British Columbia Organic Grower

COABC
Certified Organic Associations of BC

Journal for the Certified Organic Associations of BC
Fall 2009
Volume 12, Issue 4

Program Administrator:

British Columbia **Certified Organic**

COABC, 202-3002 32 Ave, Vernon BC V1T 2L7
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement
#40047167

Contents

BC Organic Grower

is received by all members of organizations belonging to the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia. *BC Organic Grower* is published quarterly by COABC.

We welcome letters to the Editor (300 words maximum) and articles (1000 words maximum). Letters to the Editor are published at the discretion of the editor, based on relevance and suitability.

Letters & submissions to:
Andrea Langlois, Editor
editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Advertising (rates & copy) & non-member subscriptions ($20/year plus GST) to:

COABC
202-3002 32nd Ave
Vernon, BC, V1T 2L7
Phone: 250-260-4429
Fax: 250-260-4436
office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca
www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

For general information or to contact your local Certifying Body, call the office – or check our website:
www.CertifiedOrganic.bc.ca

Cover photo: Bees and Autumn Beauty Sunflower, by Moss Dance
Layout & Design: Moss Dance, Rainbow Raven Design
www.rainbowraven.ca

Other photos property of COABC.

Products advertised in *BC Organic Grower* are not necessarily approved for use by organic farmers/processors. Please consult the permitted substance list CAN/32.3.11 for guidance.

Next Issue Deadline: December 2, 2009

President's Letter

By Brad Reid

Summer is almost over and everyone is hard at work with harvesting and preparations for fall. Here on the south coast (like most places in BC), we have had record heat that has brought with it new challenges – water shortages, fires, burning bans, and just plain dealing with the high temps. As fall approaches, we are looking forward to cooler temperatures and a great fall season.

With the coming of this season, your Board of Directors will be back at work planning for the coming year and assessing the first few months of the new Canadian Organic Regime. There are several questions to be answered regarding interprovincial sales, the Permitted Substances List (PSL) and Brand Names List (BNL), as well as the ongoing work of the Standards and the many challenges that they present. Many of you have submitted disputes; I have been told that they will all be worked through, although, as you can imagine, they have received many. We must therefore be patient and vigilant at the same time to ensure that all issues are addressed.

In August, the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) organized a roundtable with the new Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Steve Thompson. This was an all day meeting with members of all sectors of the agricultural communities. The meeting was an opportunity for the new Minister to hear the concerns of the different sectors. Dennis Lapierre (our representative on the BCAC) made some excellent points concerning the needs of small local "Value Chain" agriculture. We will continue to bring the message to the government that locally grown certified organic food is the way of the future for BC.

The future of organics in BC shines bright. That future includes the small organic growers and the larger commercial operations. Your BOD's job is to work for all parts of the organic industry in BC, and to build policies, lobby government and provide services that will see all areas of organic production and processing prosper in the future.

Thanks to everyone for their continued support of COABC and our common goal of providing food for the people of BC that contribute to a healthy environment, healthy animals, healthy people, and healthy economies.

GREENBYTES...

Seedy Saturdays

This year in Canada, there were 67 Seedy Saturdays, ranging in scale from only a few hours in a small town with less then 50 people, to 8 hours in a major city with many thousands of participants. A list is kept by Seeds of Diversity Canada at www.seeds.ca.

Report from the Administrator

By Sarah Clark

This time last year, the BC organic sector was just starting down the road to develop a 5-year strategic plan for 2009 to 2013. The plan was completed at the end of last year and identified five strategic priorities:

1. Increase organic sector capacity
2. Build confidence in certified organic systems and products
3. Promote environmental best practices
4. Advance organic research and innovation
5. Strengthen the BC organic sector organizational structure

The implementation of the strategic plan is a collaborative effort between government and other provincial and national organizations that play a role in moving the organic sector forward including the COABC. Ten months in – what has the COABC done to move this plan forward?

Education is a key element in increasing the organic sector capacity. The COABC, working in conjunction with organic extension services, has helped to deliver the first Grower Group Networks (GGN) and to present some regional seminars. The most recent GGN conference call on water quality was held in mid-August (see p.12 for the report). The development of the GGNs and other educational activities is being helped along by our new assistant in the COABC office, Brigitte Rozema, who is assisting in office and extension activities.There are more educational sessions planned for late fall.

Clear and effective messaging of the BC certified organic program will help to build confidence in the organic sector. We have worked towards this goal by starting the development of a presentation kit outlining the goals and activities of the COABC.

Environmental best practices are part of the underlying philosophy of organic agriculture. Organic agriculture provides ecological goods and services to the community. The COABC continues to work alongside and in support of like-minded organizations to ensure this continues.

Research is also a fundamental activity for the continued advancement of the organic sector. The COABC has its own research fund for small projects and is also advocating for more research money to continue the Organic Sector Development Program (OSDP) research projects.

Finally, it was determined that the BC Organic Sector Organizational Structure needs to be strengthened. Work needs to be done in this area, as this is where collaboration is critical. We hope to be involved in moving this forward over the next six months.

There is lots of work to do and I look forward to giving you an update a year from now to see how much further we have moved ahead. For more information, you can find the strategic plan at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

Editor's Note *by Andrea Langlois*

Andrea Langlois, Editor

Moss Dance Layout and Ad Desk

With every growing season comes many lessons. Lessons on what grows well, lessons on what equipment works best, which amendments boost the crops, and who we can count on to lend a hand when that big crop needs to come in.

This issue is full of lessons, tips and best practices. Earlier this summer, a young first-time farmer Gavin Wright put a question to the COABC listserv – what are the top 10 mistakes that growers should not make in their first few years of farming? The listserv was flooded with responses.

One of the most poignant was perhaps the following – if you ask for advice, you'll get it, and much of it will be contradictory, so do your research! In this issue, we've tried to help out with that. Barbara Joughin from Farm Folk/City Folk's Community Farm program sifted through the responses and pulled together some of the strongest advice, which we've printed here. And Gavin Wright, who asked the question, contributed a piece on what it actually means to put that advice into practice.

This issue is also has several articles on how to manage land, from using buffer zones to improve the amount of beneficial plans and insects on farms, to examining the impact farm management practices on ecological goods and services. Adding to this is an article on farmland access agreements, which is full of information on how to negotiate lease agreements when farming on someone else's land.

There is also, as usual, news and information from the COABC. Make sure to read the report back on the first Growers Group Network meeting and to note the date of this year's conference and AGM in Kamloops – March 5-7, 2010.

Dear Rochelle

by Rochelle Eisen

Dear Rochelle,

I am struggling with weeds. Every year I think it should be getting easier, but before I turn around, they are everywhere. What am I doing wrong?

Losing the Battle in Rutland

Dear Loser(!),

Yes, this is the number one challenge I sense most annual producers are constantly battling until they have a system "worked out" and even then things can go terribly wrong, especially if the weather is not ideal during critical periods in the growing season.

Weeds are inevitable. But if you believe the weed gurus, the problem is that we are not seeing what the soil is telling us, and if cultivation is the only means of control that we employ, we will never get a handle on them. The approach that needs to be embraced must come from a different perspective; one that favours crop growth, and at the same time discourages weed development. In other words, cultural weed control.

Cultural Weed Control

So what is cultural weed control? Well, it is a few things, but the first concept I am sure you will agree with is that vigorous crops definitely beat out weeds. Thus the secret seems to be to set that paradigm in place. If you agree with that logic then it is

obvious that the first necessary step is to build healthy, fertile soil, because once you have biologically active soil you will grow vigorous, competitive crops – healthy soil, healthy plants, right?

It is also important to know which weeds are your nemeses, and where they are coming from, because that will help with choosing and timing your control measures. Most crops do not need to be weed free throughout their cycle to assure good yields. If you are using compost you might also have to

The first necessary step in weed control is to build healthy, fertile soil, because once you have biologically active soil you will grow vigorous, competitive crops.

consider that maybe whoever is making it is not doing a good enough job, and this may be how weed seeds keep getting reintroduced on your farm. Or maybe your soil tilth is poor, making your cultivation practices ineffective.

If your soil is out of whack – nutrient and/or pH balance, incredibly compacted, shallow hard pan, etc. – some types of weeds will flourish. One solution might be to concentrate on growing some perennial forage in the worse areas, thereby creating shade competition in place and starting to beat back some of the most antagonistic weeds before you use this area again for annual production. Or maybe you need to start with transplants versus seed to get ahead of the weeds, especially in cold soils. Some type of mulch could also be used to give you that jumpstart.

Whatever you do, be sure to use the best most viable seeds you can find, of the best variety appropriate for your area. This will surely help produce a competitive crop. And as I am sure you have heard before, mow weedy areas around fields to reduce reseeding opportunities, clean machinery especially when moving from a weedy to a clean field, search out weed-infested areas and get them under control to help minimize spread, and use only well-composted materials.

Mechanical Weed Control

One of the best manuals I have read to date on timing mechanical weed control is FiBL's *Weed Control in Organic Vegetable Cultivation*. It not only explains the how and why, but also has fantastic charts and graphs comparing ridge versus flatbed planting, the effectiveness of various weed treatment patterns (false seedbed in combo with blind harrowing or shallow flaming relevant to seed depth), impact of weather on treatments, and even lists the advantages and disadvantage of various cultivators. The manual also includes a useful checklist to help confirm that all the key factors align (land and weed condition, and the methodology of control suitable), ultimately increasing the chance of success.

Beyond the checklist some of the other gems in this manual are:

- As a general rule, it is important to keep most crops weed-free during the first half of their growing cycle; non-competitive crops need another 2-4 weeks of care, but leafy greens need to be clean for the entire cycle.
- Manual labour is the most costly annual expense on a farm. If weather hampers mechanical management, labour costs will go up.
- If the manual weed control expense is greater than 1/3 of the potential gross product sales, it is not possible for the impacted crop to realize a profit. Better to plough under a weedy field and reseed than to spend money on labour to weed the crop. Make this decision as early as possible to reduce labour expenditures.
- Seed/plant in straight rows or there is no way mechanical cultivation can be effective.
- Keep the number of row spacing combinations down as much as possible to reduce the frequency that equipment has to be adjusted to accommodate row spacing variations.
- Seed cover crops or complimentary (non-competitive) crops between the rows of your main crop, after the main crop is established.

The principles are the same no matter the scale of the operation. The problem has been finding equipment suitable for operations that are too small to afford specialized

tractor mounted equipment, yet at the same time is too large to manually hoe. Just the other day I tripped over this interesting website www.physicalweeding.com that does an excellent job covering all the bases, but they also have designed and are marketing a four wheel hoe which they describe as a tool that "fills a gap among weeding machines being created for growers producing crops on the bed system, i.e., not on ridges, with cropping areas to large to hand hoe and too small to justify tractor mounted hoes."

The website goes on and explains that it "can control both interrow (between the crop row) and intrarow (in the crop row) weeds by a combination of horizontal knife blade 'T' hoes and 'mini-ridger' hoes." Now if that isn't the cat's meow, I don't know what else is!

To find the resources mentioned in this column and more online visit:

Cyber-Help for Organic Farmers' Growing Organic Vegetable page www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/training/vegetable.htm (under the "Tillage and Cultivation" heading) or under the "Weed Management" heading on the Pest Management page www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/training/pestmanagement.htm

GREENBYTES... Bee'ing There

No one can deny that bees are being harmed by various stressors; hopefully organic farms are serving as havens for both native and domestic bees, as the continued loss of pollinators threatens both the health of our ecosystems and the production of our food. Here are some tips to help build your bee populations:

- **Increase crop diversity.**
- **Encourage hive building by adding fences, trees and shrubs.**
- **Wherever possible plant native flowering shrubs or trees.**
- **Build water features and/or waterways - bees need water sources.**
- **Minimize interference and impact on the bee life cycle.**
- **Plant more flowering plants to provide a stronger nectar and pollen source throughout the growing season.**

Characteristics of plants that attract bees:

- **Full of nectar**
- **Brightly coloured with petals that are usually blue or yellow or a mixture of these (bees cannot see red)**
- **Sweetly aromatic or have a minty fragrance**
- **Open in the daytime**
- **Provide landing platforms**
- **Often bilaterally symmetrical (one side of the flower is a mirror image of the other)**
- **Flowers are often tubular with nectar at base of tube**

www.pollinator.org/Resources/Farming_for_Bees_2nd_edition.pdf

By Rochelle Eisen

Lynda Dixon: Maude Island Farm

By Spring Gillard

"I will be in town and therefore near a phone this Tuesday between 9 & 5," wrote Lynda Dixon in an email, replying to my request to interview her. Ok, already I was intrigued. Her response implied that she wasn't normally near a phone. This probably had a lot to do with where her farm was - on Maude Island in the Queen Charlottes or Haida Gwai, meaning *Islands of the People*.

Colin, Lynda and Lisa at the market

Born and raised in North Vancouver, Lynda fell in love with Maude Island when she took a nursing job in the Charlottes 21 years ago. "It had a pebble beach, it was wild and forested with a meadow in the front. I just thought it would be a beautiful place to live," she said.

Laird, the man she was dating, now her husband, was not as enthusiastic. He had lived on the islands all his life and knew what it took to live in a remote setting. But four years later, they picked Lynda's log cabin up off the beach at Charlotte City and floated it over to Maude on a log raft.

"We were cooking a turkey as we floated across," Lynda laughs. "The only way to move. You don't have to pack a single box." They lived in that cabin for 10 years before building a house.

Lynda amidst CSA bounty at Maude Island Farm

Their first years were spent felling trees and clearing the land. The plan was to have a market garden and greenhouse. They now run a three-acre market garden growing beets, carrots, onions, potatoes, lettuce and peas. The greenhouse? Well, it's still just a frame, but the plastic sits nearby at the ready.

"Root crops grow really well here," says Lynda. "Carrots are the most popular." According to Lynda, most of the agricultural belt on the Queen Charlotte Islands tends to have very sandy soil, but on Maude Island it is inexplicably rich.

The produce feeds 36 families – all belong to their CSA (Community Shared Agriculture). Every Wednesday for 18 weeks of the year, they box up the fresh food, pile it into their boat and make the 20 minute crossing to Charlotte City where they deliver each box to the doorsteps of their shareholders. On Saturday, they sell the remaining produce at the Charlotte City Farmers' Market, a small but growing event in this city of 1000 people.

"We had two vendors to start, now we have five," she says. The other vendors sell shell fish, processed meats, hydroponic tomatoes and baked goods.

"People are becoming more attuned to buying local. They are delighted with the freshness and quality of the produce too. We

sell out within a couple hours most market days," says Lynda.

When I ask about the challenges of growing on a remote island, she names many issues to which BC growers can relate. Deer, kept out by a good fence. Slugs, which thrive in the cool, wet climate. Not enough sun to sweeten up the fruit.

> "This isn't a money-making venture. I just love growing food and believe in having a secure source of food on the island."

Living off the grid has unique challenges too. They have to freight in everything they need including soil amendments and animal feed, which is costly. (Lynda thinks freight subsidies for farmers would help encourage more people to grow food.) Thanks to Laird's ingenuity, they have some power; a turbine generates electricity from the creek that runs through their property. They also

Continued on page 12....

Connecting Society, Farmers and Ecosystems

By Wanda Gorsuch and Ramona Scott

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."
Aldo Leopold

Farmers, ranchers, land use planners, conservationists, scientists, economists and others in BC are buzzing about the need to recognize the role ecosystems play on farm and ranchland in providing environmental benefits for society. On the other hand, the people that need to champion ecological goods and services from farmland live in a world where broccoli sprouts in the produce aisle, meat is born in shrink wrap, and clean water gushes forth in a never ending stream from their tap.

This disconnection between society, farmers and ecosystems is a serious problem as farmland plays an important role in protecting and maintaining ecosystems. Ecosystems provide ecological goods and services (EG&S). EG&S are benefits people get from ecosystems and are considered to be critical for human well-being.[1] Examples of EG&S include food, fibre, flood control, erosion control, soil health and maintenance and wildlife. Farmland can provide EG&S for public well-being. Secondly, food production relies on EG&S. Finally, farm management practices have a significant impact on the production, protection and maintenance of EG&S.

Our mainstream food system is complicated, in part because while food is a commodity, it is also a human need. As a result, we have conflicting policies and programs that don't give farmers clear signals about what society values. For example, government farm income support programs are partially coupled to production. By coupling support with production, farmers are sent the signal that production has greater value to society than an ecosystem, such as a wetland.

On the other hand, governments also provide payments for beneficial management practices to mitigate the negative impact farm management practices can have on the environment. When farm input costs, such as energy and water, are given artificially low values, farmers don't receive any signal that they need to be finding management practices that conserve these resources. Another mixed message is sent by BC's property tax system where land set aside for ecological purposes may be classified as Residential rather than Farm, hence sending the message that there is no value to these set-asides.

In summary, farmers and society are working from an economic-based decision-making system (with no market for ecological goods and services), where farmers are rewarded for high-yield/low cost operations. These conditions do not result in policies, programs or decision-making tools that consistently motivate farmers and ranchers to provide ecological goods and services beyond a regulatory level.

Some may argue that with only 5% of BC land suitable for farming, and with our extensive parks and protected areas, we should not be concerned about ecosystems on agricultural land. On the other hand, on-going food production relies on these ecosystems. In addition, BC is one of the most biodiverse provinces in Canada. The areas of highest species richness coincide with our best soils, as well as our greatest urban development pressures. It is important we find ways of ensuring that ecosystems on our farm and ranch lands provide public environmental benefits.

Over the last ten or so years, Canadian and provincial governments, along with universities, private organizations and individuals, are consistently recognizing, researching and writ-

ing about the important interactions between farm management practices and ecosystems. For example, there is the federal Ecological Goods and Services Research Initiative, the "Green Issue" of the Western Producer (January 2009), and numerous publications from NGOs, universities and others.

Other OECD countries have implemented national programs creating markets for EG&S (e.g. UK, US, EU, Australia). Some, such as the United Kingdom Environmental Stewardship scheme, require farmers to meet a minimum level of environmental performance before they are eligible for payments. The Conservation Security Program in the United States "is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources." Unlike the UK program, the CSP provides payments for minimum environmental actions as well as additional payments for actions that are an "exceptional conservation effort."

There are Canadian examples of programs that create EG&S markets. For example, Prince Edward Island has adopted an Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) policy. ALUS is a voluntary program where farmers are compensated through annual payments for actions that provide EG&S, such as improving and increasing wildlife habitat. The original the ALUS pilot project in the Rural Municipality of Blanshard, Manitoba concluded in 2008. There are several ALUS demonstration farms in Norfolk County, Ontario and a newly formed Ontario ALUS Alliance (www.norfolkalus.com). The results of the ALUS pilot project and other EG&S research funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will be available this summer.

Government payments made to farmers and ranchers for provision of ecological goods and services can fall under the World Trade Organization Green Box. This means these payments are allowable by the World Trade Organization, depending on the program design.

In BC, the not-for-profit organization Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust brings farmers and conservation together in "Partners for Stewardship." The Trust shares the costs of management practices that contribute to soil and wildlife habitat conservation and enhancement in the Fraser Delta (www.deltafarmland.ca).

Although the federal government is investigating the potential for ecological goods and services programs, the new five year federal agricultural policy framework "Growing Forward" does not include such policies or programs. On the provincial front, BC's Agriculture plan "Growing a Healthy Future for BC's Families" includes ecological goods and services. However, it is devoted to mitigation of wildlife damage, not encouraging production of EG&S. Most agri-environmental programs in Canada and BC only address minimal environmental performance levels, not the production of EG&S for public benefit.

Grassroots leadership is needed to bring an agricultural EG&S program to BC. Grassroots organizations are able to focus on a single goal, are able to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and have the freedom to be creative and resourceful. Partnerships at the grassroots level are a necessity as EG&S touches on all three pillars of sustainability (environment, economic and social). For example, the ALUS pilot project in Manitoba involved 35 partners including farmers, universities, conservation organizations, hunting organizations, and multiple levels of government.

Overall, our food system sends our farmers conflicting messages about the provision of EG&S. Yet the public is starting to value EG&S, and government and other organizations encouraging beneficial management practices through policies and programs. Providing a market for EG&S may be an interim measure as our decision-making structures and related goals readjust to demonstrate our society's new awareness of the importance of EG&S. Perhaps in the future farmers will not face conflicting information about the provision of ecological goods and services from their land and the true costs of food production will be reflected in the price they receive.

[1] Costanza, R., d'Arge, R., de Groot, R., Farber, S., Grasso, M., Hannon, B., Limburg, K., Naeem, S., O'Neill, R.V., Paruelo, J., Raskin, R.G., Sutton, P. & van den Belt, M. (1997). The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital. Nature, 387, 253-260.

Wanda Gorsuch, BSc, MA, AAg, is a contractor who provides research and writing skills for sustainable agriculture projects in BC. She is currently working on contract with The Land Conservancy of British Columbia. For more information about ecological goods and services, contact her at: wanda@gorsuch.ca.

Ramona Scott is the Manager of Agricultural Programs for the Land Conservancy.

... Continued from page 9

have hot and cold running water and flush toilets, but no phone or computer, just a marine radio phone for emergencies.

It is the lack of community that is perhaps the most difficult. Their family consists of three kids, 50 chickens, some ducks, rabbits and various other "pets." The only other island inhabitants besides wildlife are a couple of caretakers. Lynda wishes there were more farmers nearby so she could exchange information with them.

"We have a lot of Wwoofers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) working here and we really enjoy having them. They are part of our social life," says Lynda.

Even to get the organic inspectors to their farm is an expensive, epic venture. Fortunately, they have "low-risk farm designation," which means the PACS inspectors don't have to come every year.

"The biggest challenge is to try to create and maintain agriculture here. Very few people farm and stick to it. It's expensive to grow here." Lynda and Laird have had various jobs over the years to supplement their income. She was talking to me today from her "second job," at a food processing co-op they helped set up a few years ago.

"We are so dependent on imports. Even when the Queen of the North ferry sank, people started hoarding food here. What happens when the oil does run out? We are in a very precarious position," she says in a grave tone. Then her voice brightens. "This isn't a money-making venture. I just love growing food and believe in having a secure source of food on the island."

Spring Gillard is author of Diary of a Compost Hotline Operator *and volunteers with the Westside Food Security Collaborative. Her website is* www.compostdiary.com*.*

"Water Quality" Conference Call A Success!

By Rochelle Eisen

The August 18th Grower's Group Network conference call on "Your Farm's Water Quality" was a success with good attendance and excellent information presented to growers.

Elsie Friesen, Food Safety & Quality Specialist, BCMAL and **Steven Gallagher**, lead farmer of Nathan Creek Organic Farm gave an informative and lively presentation on water quality issues faced by growers. Topics discussed were: what is good water, sources of contamination, water quality guidelines, and how to test water. Steven Gallagher described the on-farm water quality challenges he faces and the methods used to manage his water. A variety of pertinent questions from listeners were answered by the speakers. Some interesting highlights of the call were:

- It is better to sell vegetables visibly dirty if you cannot guarantee they have been rinsed with potable (drinking quality) water
- For produce eaten raw, growers need to adhere to BCMAL's pre-harvest interval guidelines if their irrigation water quality doesn't meet the criteria listed in Table 1 at www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/publist/500Series/512000-3.pdf. These guidelines apply to both overhead and drip irrigation.
- Certification Bodies are not responsible for on-farm water quality, the farmer is!

If you would like to listen to recording of this conference call, it is available as a download, for a limited time, at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/audio/waterquality.htm.

The PowerPoint presentation which was viewed at the same time is found at: www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/training/waterggnPPT.pdf. Excellent resources relating to this topic can also be found on the COABC Cyber-Help On Farm Food Safety page www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/training/foodsafety.htm.

Become a COABC Sponsor and cultivate the growth of certified organic food and agriculture throughout British Columbia.

The Certified Organic Associations of BC relies on generous financial partnerships with allied organizations to support our operations and essential programs. This is your opportunity to expose your brand to a large and growing target market. Please join us in promoting a healthier, more vital and prosperous region by becoming a sponsor of COABC. Our diverse sponsorship programs include value-added sponsor benefits and comprehensive exposure. For more information, and to reserve your exclusive sponsorship opportunity, please contact the COABC Sponsorship Administrator, Sarah Clark at 250-260-4429.

Sector Quarterly Journal BC Organic Grower (BCOG)
It goes out to close to 700 subscribers in the BC organic sector including all members of the organizations belonging to the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia. The BCOG has been in print for over 10 years and is well respected in the sector. It is a source of technical learning and sector information, including research updates and events. Your support will help keep this valuable tool available and support more cutting-edge content.

Annual Conference
This is the organic sector event of the year! This fun and educational opportunity has become a tradition which includes special speakers, workshops, networking and social events. All COABC members, organic agricultural enthusiasts, and the general public are invited. Advertising for the 2009 conference will have a reach of 1,142,000. Your support makes this even possible!

Website
When people are looking for BC organics, they discover our website first! It has experienced a 194% increase in traffic since 2004. Our website includes a user-friendly database of certified products, who produces them, how to become certified, local events, learning options and so much more. COABC members, those thinking of becoming certified, and consumers have come to rely on this site! Being a sponsor of the COABC website represents a partnership with people who are working to provide healthy food, from healthy soil, with sustainable practices.

Cyber-help for Organic Farmers
One of the best online farming resources in BC and across Canada! It experiences and average of 11,000 page views monthly and has over 60 relevant incoming links from web sites and blogs. It is #1 ranking on Google for organic farming news, organic fruit prices, organic companies and organic seed sources searches. Our objective is to encourage organic and alternative food production in Canada by improving accessibility to quality organic farming content online. Visit www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca to learn more. Your support will increase our capacity to provide more current information, answer more Q&A and provide more up-to-date coverage of Canadian farming networking opportunities.

Pacific Agricultural Show (PAS)
The PAS is an annual event which attracts over 7500 farmers and producers from across BC, Alberta and the Pacific Northwest. It is the largest BC agricultural show with over 200 exhibitors, high-end educational sessions and infinite networking possibilities. As the sponsor for this event, you will make it possible for COABC to provide an organic presence in the agricultural sector of BC.

Regional seminars
In just 3 years over 15 workshops have occurred in various regions of the province. Our objective is to encourage organic food production in BC by sponsoring educational events that bring the expert to the growers in their own communities. The goal is to improve the knowledge base of BC producers so that they can either improve on what they are already doing or expand into new organic opportunities. Your support will allow us to continue this project and eventually increase the diversity of speakers.

Good for **You**, Good for the **Environment**

202 - 3002 32nd Ave, Vernon, BC, V1T 2L7
Phone: 250-260-4429 Fax: 250-260-4436
www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

"TOP 5" THINGS TO DO FOR NEW FARMERS

Advice from Experienced Organic Farmers

By Barbara Joughin

Earlier this summer, farmers shared their experiences with organic farming on the COABC list serve in response to a plea for the "top 10" important things to do in the first few years of farming. Thanks to Gavin Wright for asking the question, and to the farmers that shared their wisdom – Alyson Chisholm, Susan Davidson, John and Katy Ehrlich, Mary Alice Johnson, Bruce Miller, Larry Pierce, Chris Thoreau, Ralph Walton, and Eva Johansson (with apologies to anyone missed).

Rather than listing over 50 suggestions verbatim, this information is compiled and sorted into five main topics: attitude, business, best practices, learning, and lifestyle and sustainability.

1 **Attitude** is everything! Don't forget why you are doing what you are doing, and take time every day to enjoy your own food and the beauty of your farm. Cultivate gratitude.

Be open to receiving support – from your family and your community. Get to know your neighbours, it's good to have them on your side when the livestock escape, hay needs to be brought in, or you need to borrow something.

2 **Business** Farmers are in the business of growing. Beginning farmers may not know this, but to be a successful farmer, you need to be a good business person. Start small, but think long-term and where you can expand as your market grows.

Make a 5-10 year business plan, and follow it. It doesn't have to be complicated, but it should include estimates of crop yields, gross income, fixed and variable costs.

Keep good records - you think you will remember, but you won't. Every now and again re-examine your operation and actual requirements. Anticipate your needs so you can make orderly changes – and don't cling to stuff that clutters your life 50 weeks of the year!

Understand the difference between marketing and advertising, and know your market. Don't grow *anything* unless you know who will buy it. Strive for quality, and sell produce you're proud of. And, value your labour when you set prices. Don't get into the race to the bottom by undercutting other farmers, work together to maintain prices that will support you.

Go for value-added if you can, but research each idea – you might make more money selling your hay than selling the cows you feed it to.

Market directly to consumers (farm gate, CSA, farmer's markets), rather than to stores or wholesalers – but only if you can afford to take time away from production.

Know about the "perks" available to farmers: register as a business and get your GST back; keep receipts for claiming farm expenses; get a farmer's card from BCAC; get farm (or fleet) insurance on all farm vehicles; buy marked fuel; get PST exemption; ensure farm status for your land; and register with AgriInvest to start saving for the bad years.

3 **Best practices** People shared enough advice about best farming practices to fill an entire issue. Here are some highlights:

Share as much as possible – equipment, market deliveries, and the farm. To help strengthen business and human relationships, farm with at least three equal stakeholders.

When starting out, share, lease or borrow land rather than take on a big mortgage. A signed, long-term agreement gives stability and security. Without one, your investment is at risk.

Learn about the quality and quantity of your water supply and about irrigation.

Keep good records, and log ALL the hours you invest in the operation to help evaluate priorities and to enable true cost accounting.

Learn about green manures and cover crops, and use them to build up organic matter and smother weeds.

Buy organic seed grown in a climate similar to yours. And, save your own seed.

Buy the best quality equipment you can get – avoid cheap or old equipment unless you have the skills and time to fix it.

Wear sunscreen and a hat!

4 Learning Research your planned farming venture as much as possible, and subscribe to journals, magazines, and other media to keep information flowing in your life. Read Canadian and BC organic standards – they contain lots of good information and history.

Seek advice and mentoring from, or work part-time with experienced farmers while starting your farm business. You can learn valuable lessons about business and growing that could save you from bankruptcy.

Talk to locals about climate, soil, planting dates, diseases, pests, markets, etc. But remember, when you ask for advice, you'll get it, and much of it will not be the same! Take time to do your own research.

5 Lifestyle and sustainability Immerse yourself in farming – it's a lifestyle, not a job. Take care of yourself, physically and otherwise. Stay fit during the quiet season, take time off when you can, and make room for leisure even during the busy season.

Make feeding yourself and your family a priority – growing most of your own food will help keep your family healthy, and save a lot of money.

These final words are from Alyson Chisholm – good luck to everyone starting farming. It's a wonderful life, and if done wisely it is indeed a viable livelihood.

Barbara Joughin is a writer, researcher, and community developer, currently creating information resources for the Community Farms Program (www.communityfarms.ca).

FIELDSTONE GRANARY OPEN HOUSE

By Denise Stanley

Fieldstone Granary held an open house on April 4, 2009, to provide current and potential organic grain growers an opportunity to view the new facility and to learn from industry leaders and policy makers about organic grain production.

The day began with brief introductions and an invitation for those interested to ask questions of Fieldstone staff about the mill. The first speaker was Steve Snider from New Norway, Alberta. Steve, who was named Alberta's "Outstanding Young Farmer of the Year" in 2003, provided important information about weed control, crop rotation and equipment etc. His family's organic farm, Little Red Hen Mills, has been in production for many years and they have vast experience with green manures (his morning topic) and intercropping (the afternoon discussion). Steve's "green manure" is a blend of oats, barley, peas and faba beans, and puts fiber and energy back into the soil. Increased fiber results in the soil holding

Continued on page 28...

THE FARMER'S VOICE

Off to Join the Circus... Diary of a First Year Farmer

By Gavin Wright

Credit: Gavin Wright

We had just finished our most successful market so far. We started the day with piles of vegetables and coolers full of bagged mixed greens and lovely eggs. Just before the morning bell sounded to signal the beginning of shopping, we actually had a small line-up, attracted by the mounds of colourful carrots and beets.

Credit: Gavin Wright

Throughout the day we were visited by hundreds of people happy to be spending their money on fresh, local, organic food. One woman told me how our heirloom heart-shaped tomatoes look just like the perfect tomato she bought once, but had never been able to find again; a local chef informed us that we had the nicest mixed greens at the market before buying three pounds to serve in his restaurant.

All of this elevated me to a feeling of bliss, a feeling that all the work was really worth it, and I had this epiphany. "I'm a *farmer.* I'm actually growing and providing food for people." What an absolutely amazing thing to be doing – but how did I get here?

I'm a new farmer, currently in the middle of my first year of running my own small organic farm business. This is an article about my experiences after saying goodbye to city life and striking off to the Pemberton Meadows with my partner Sarah to create a full-on farming experience we call Rootdown Organics.

As this was to be our first year of farming on our own, Sarah and I endeavored to get as much advice from experienced farmers as we could in the early season. Some of the best advice came through the COABC listserv. The following is a description of some of the tidbits of advice that we received and how they have played out for us.

Seek advice and mentoring from experienced farmers.

In terms of mentoring, our entire first year of farming was made possible because of the support and generosity of the Helmer family of Helmer's Organic Farm. The Helmers provided us with a lease on an acre of their land in the Pemberton Meadows. They tilled our field for us, loaned us equipment, and shared a wealth of knowledge, advice and community.

The only trouble with having so much support was that I became a little complacent. Everything was so easy for us at the beginning, and it led to problems later on. Way back in March a local farmer had advised us that flea beetles (*Phyllotreta cruciferae*) were a significant pest in the area and that we would want to use a row cover like Reemay if we were planning to grow any brassica greens. He even of-

fered to give us some of his old Reemay for free. I had seen flea beetle before on tomatoes, but had never known them to be a problem with brassicas.

We planted our greens mix in the greenhouse and had no problem, so didn't think there was any pressing need for Reemay. As soon as we planted brassicas outside, in mid-may, they were decimated. You could literally wave your hand over the rows and watch a cloud of little black flea beetles rise up. We were gutted, but learnt our lesson.

Make sure you have enough water to farm.

Of course our battle with beetles wasn't going to be our only lesson in the dangers of complacency. Around the same time, we were learning the dangers of our "wait and see" attitude toward irrigation. Remember that drought/heat wave in late May? We had arranged to borrow a pump to irrigate our field, but hadn't set it up, given it a trial, or purchased the amount of hose and sprinkler heads we needed to keep our field consistently moist.

Credit: Gavin Wright

Predictably, the pump, which hadn't been used in a while, needed maintenance shortly after we started using it, before we had had a chance to even give the field a once-over watering. We watched in hor-

ror as everybody else benefited from an amazing early season growth spurt, while our crops seemed like they were frozen in time. We took to calling ourselves "mini farm," where we grow a small amount of really small produce.

Buy the best quality you can get. The world is full of cheap stuff, and every time some cheap thing breaks you have to go to town to replace it.

The water issue turned out to be a symptom of a larger challenge we had created for ourselves. We had intended to invest as little money as possible in our first year of farming, adhering to the mantra "share, borrow and rent wherever possible." Yet it is equally important to understand where an investment needs to be made and to invest in quality when it does.

We went through two sets of cheap sprinkler heads before we finally invested in the Perrot sprinklers at Lee Valley Tools (the ones we had originally looked at). We also spent many hours hauling around hoses, trying not to damage our crops, before we finally invested in some rigid PVC piping to structure some of our irrigation system.

Never farm monogamously – work cooperatively where possible.

We made another important "discovery" early on in our first year farming – we aren't the only new young farmers out there, which is fabulous. But we had this image that we were going to have this significant market advantage because of our "story" as new young farmers in this great age of food re-discovery, and that's true to a certain extent. But it's not so easy to cash in on the exciting uniqueness of being a new young farmer when there are three or four other new young farmers at the market with the same quaint baby carrots and mixed greens that you have.
So we need a cooperative marketing mechanism where we market together, agree to specialize in different products, agree to attend different markets, or some combination of the three. Many of the other farmers in our region are very keen to work cooperatively and develop something that will work for everyone and where we can support each other.

Be aware of governments and their assistance.

Many farmers seem wary of government programs and skeptical of government aid. This is one area where I have so far had a different experience. Both Sarah and I were eligible for employment insurance (EI), having been laid off from our city jobs, and were eligible for the Community Futures program – a self-employment program funded through Service Canada. During the 11-month program, they helped us to develop a business plan, gave us sales and marketing advice, as well as an opportunity to network in our new community, and last but not least, we each received a monthly EI support cheque, regardless of how much we made in our business.

Immerse yourself in farming; it's a lifestyle, not a job.

Whatever form or level of mechanization you have, running a small farm is something you immerse yourself in. I struggled with this in the beginning; I am used to an eight-hour work day and taking the opportunity to relax and engage in hobbies. Suddenly, I was going to work 12-13 hours a day, eating, sleeping and then repeating the cycle. Once I did accept it, I was able to appreciate the amazing thing that we are doing. I still believe that it is possible to have hobbies, and take days off, but it requires accepting that I am immersed in a living system that also has a schedule.

Do not forget why you are doing what you are doing. Make sure you take time to enjoy your own food and the beauty of your farm.

One of the keys to accepting full immersion in farming was to take the time to appreciate our garden, the stunning wildness that surrounds us, and the fresh taste of the food we produce. We haven't bought vegetables in months, and I have never consistently eaten food that tasted so fabulous and made my body and mind feel so good. I try to lean on my hoe and stare out with appreciation at my garden at least once a day.

Last words...

I have decided to continue farming. It can be intense and overwhelming at times, but it is also beautiful and fulfilling in ways that exceed anything else I've ever been involved in.

I recently read an article from a new farmer's point of view, where someone was quoted saying that becoming a farmer was our generation's version of going off to join the circus. I like that analogy...

Gavin Wright is a first-year farmer who strives to promote sustainable food systems through engagement and education. Rootdown Organics: http://rootdownbc.

Greenhouse / Hoophouse Seminar

By Cara Nunn, Administrator for North Okanagan Organic Association

On June 7, 2009, a presentation and seminar was organised by the North Okanagan Organic Association in conjunction with COABC's Regional Seminar Series Funding at the beautiful Mara Hall.

The basis of the seminar was an hour-long video on hoophouse construction and production presented by Adam Montri from Michigan State University. The video had an in-depth demonstration of erecting a hoophouse, and included discussion about cost, site development, and production issues.

The video was followed up by an open forum discussion featuring Hermann Bruns, John Lipski, and Karen Brown. Hermann Bruns of Wildflight Farm is a successful certified organic farmer with several greenhouses including a mobile greenhouse in operation. John Lipski of the Professional Gardener has been providing greenhouses and season extension products to the Okanagan Valley for thirteen years. Karen Brown of Crofton Grower Services has an extensive line of soil products, organic seed plugs and OMRI approved fertilizers. Karen also has over 25 years experience in greenhouse and market garden production.

Hoophouse growing early spring crops. Left to right: lettuce, kohlrabi, green onions, mesclun mix, beets.

With 27 participants from as far away as Grand Forks, Clearwater and Penticton, the seminar was well received. Participants were interested in expanding their knowledge of construction techniques of greenhouses. There was also a lot of interest in plant rotation and planting schedule, as well as the extension benefits. Hermann felt that although there was always a possibility to grow through the winter, there wasn't really a sufficient market identified to warrant the cost. Some other interesting issues that came up: the lack of insect pressure in our valley within the greenhouses; the different methods of cooling a greenhouse in the summer months using misters and vents; the cost/benefit analysis of building a greenhouse with a two-year pay off scheme; the ability to use a minimal structure here to keep costs low and the wide variety of winter hardy plants that can be cultivated in unheated hoophouses in our valley.

The afternoon of the seminar involved a tour of Hermann Bruns' greenhouses at his farm. The participants were happy to have an actual greenhouse structure in front of them to complement the knowledge gleaned in the morning. Hermann demonstrated several innovations he devised to improve the farming inside the greenhouse, such as flashing to keep out quack grass. The moveable greenhouse was also an interesting addition to the tour.

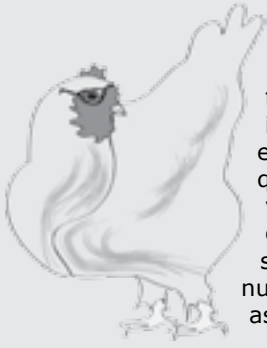
The overall impression of the participants was that the information provided was useful and that they would be considering building or expanding their current greenhouse operation in the future based on the information they received. There were requests for future seminars on soil building techniques and testing, alternative fuel sources for farm operations, and irrigation.

Another interesting note on the participants that

Jennie Greven harvesting overwintered green onions in late April.

completed a questionnaire: eight were from certified organic farms, five were currently farming but weren't certified, and five weren't farming at all. There was an even split in age groups with about half appearing to be near retirement and the other half appearing to be fresh out of school.

Chick Tips ... Records for Feed Mixing



Beyond organic certification requirements, good records are essential for any serious poultry owner wishing to continuously optimize conditions for their flock. While good records of health and production are fundamental, the need for records of feed is often overlooked, especially if one is mixing their own feed. Subtle changes in diet can have significant effects on bird health, growth, feed conversion, egg production and egg quality. In order to investigate such problems well-kept records can provide invaluable clues. Records might include mixing sheets for each batch of feed blended, source and dating on any ingredients, including protein supplements and vitamin premixes, and ingredient inventory records. Any nutrient analyses done on ingredients or finished feed should be maintained as part of the dataset.

It is good to keep a sample of every batch of feed made. But, collecting good feed samples can be a challenge. There are two types of samples: composite samples and individual grab samples. Composite samples are the best to assess the entire batch of feed. Several grab samples of about 1 pound each should be collected from various parts of the batch of feed. Care should be taken to ensure that several areas are represented. These samples are then thoroughly mixed together and about 1 pound of that mix held back and stored in a cool, dry place. Samples can be stored in plastic "Zip-Lock" bags or waxed paper bags, such as coffee bags. Feed samples should be kept for a reasonable period of time, for example 1 month, after the entire batch has been consumed.

Individual grab samples can be valuable for the assessment of the efficiency of the mixer. Several samples are taken, as with the composite sample, but instead of mixing them, each sample is analysed individually for some key nutrients. For example, the samples could be tested for salt or Calcium. The degree of variation that is observed gives a good idea of the efficiency of the mixer.

Because feed is one of the most important and costly inputs into any poultry flock, keeping good records of its mixing and use is a critical practice to follow.

By Dr. William Cox, BC Ministry of Agriculture's Poultry Health Veterinarian Contact him by telephone 604 556-3023 or email William.Cox@gov.bc.ca

The Lay of the Land

Farmland Rental Agreements

By Wanda Gorsuch and Ramona Scott

Rented farm and ranch land play a significant role in BC agriculture. According to the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Agriculture, farm and ranch land rental forms 45% of reported farm tenure in BC. Of the 2,888,647 hectares of farmland reported, only 55% of that land is owned by census farms. The remaining 45% is made up of land leased from government (32%); land rented or leased from others (11%); land under other arrangements (1%) and land under a crop share agreement (<1%).

Overview of rental agreements

Moving from a handshake to a written rental agreement promotes good relationships and clear communication between farmers and landowners. For example, a written agreement:

- clarifies responsibilities and draws out hidden assumptions,
- provides documentation for tax purposes,
- provides a basis for negotiation in lieu of court proceedings if there is a disagreement, and
- acts as a guide for successors if either landowner or farmer becomes incapacitated or passes away.

BC's Law and Equity Act, section 39, states that a contract respecting land or the disposition of land is not enforceable unless (a) there is, in writing signed by the party to be charged or by that party's agent, both an indication that it has been made and a reasonable indication of the subject matter. This means that a rental agreement dealing with land must be in writing for it to be enforceable.

A written agreement can be a positive tool to strengthen relationships and does not need to be seen as implying distrust by either party.

Farmland rental agreements can be between different parties: For example, agreements can be between:

- a private landowner and a farmer(s), or
- a provincial or local government and a farmer, or
- a provincial or local government and a community organization who in turn has an agreement with a farmer, or
- a land trust, as landowner, and the farmer(s), or
- a community organization, such as a non-profit society, a landowner, and the farmer(s), or
- a land trust, as landowner, and a community organization who in turn has an agreement with the farmer(s).

Considerations

For both landowners and farmers, there is more to a good land rental agreement than price. When drafting an agreement, farmers and landowners should take the following into account:

Compatibility: Do you have a similar vision? Can differences in opinion be discussed?

Honesty: Do you trust each other?

Clarity: Do both of you clearly understand the terms of the agreement? Are those terms in writing?

Equitability: Are the agreement terms fair to each of you?

Flexibility: Can the agreement be amended if changes occur?

Suitability: Is the agreement suitable to the type of farm operation and does it encourage sustainable practices?[1]

Types of Agreements

The following paragraphs briefly describe four types of farm rental agreements – lease, licence, memorandum of understanding and profit à prendre. The type of agreement you select will depend on your individual circumstances. For more information, see the "Guide to Farmland Access Agreements" produced by the Land Conservancy of BC.

For farmers, a lease can be the ideal agreement for long-term farmland access as it conveys most of the rights of a landowner other than the right to sell the land or degrade it un-

reasonably. Leases can be registered on title, meaning the lease stays with the land, even if the land is sold ("runs with the land"). However, a lease is not suitable for all situations. For example, approval from the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) is required to register one lease on part of a parcel of land or multiple leases on one title in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). In other situations, a license or a memorandum of understanding may be suitable for a "trial period" before committing to a longer-term, more binding relationship such as a lease.

Licenses and memoranda of understanding do not provide any rights of a landowner and cannot be registered on title. If licences and memoranda of understanding meet certain criteria, they can be considered contracts and come within the law of contracts. If the land is sold, the new owner is not bound by the licence. If the person with the licence passes away, the estate cannot transfer the licence to the heirs unless stated so in the licence. These types of agreements may be suitable for shorter-term agreements between a landowner and farmer prior to committing to a longer-term agreement or where the land is unlikely to be sold, for example, when the land is held by a land trust.

Although not often used outside the forestry and mining sectors, a profit à prendre can be registered on title like a lease. A profit à prendre implies or states the rights necessary to remove an item from the land, (e.g., crops, timber, game, minerals), including the right to enter the land and use as much of the surface as necessary. This type of agreement may be suitable where one agreement applies to part of a parcel or multiple agreements on one parcel of land are to be registered on title. Permission is not required from the ALC.

Legal distinction between different types of rental agreements depends on the actual relationship between the parties. Not what the parties decide to call the agreement. For example, you can call your agreement a "lease" but if the actual relationship is more like a contract, the courts may view your agreement as such, and not as a lease.

In conclusion...

Regardless of which type of rental agreement you use, good agreements are only possible when all parties are honest, equitable and flexible. Everyone involved should have a clear and common understanding of the terms in the agreement to ensure that the agreement is enforceable over the duration of the relationship between the parties.

As a farmland trust with a mandate to "protect farmland for farming," The Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC) rents land to farmers. Many farmers on community farms rent land from landowners or community organizations. As a result of these activities, and numerous questions from farmers and landowners about rental agreements, TLC and FarmFolk/CityFolk, under the Community Farms Program (www.communityfarms.ca), embarked on a project to provide farmers and landowners with a practical guide to rental agreements in BC. This project was generously supported by the Real Estate Foundation of BC and The Law Foundation of BC.

The "Guide to Farmland Access Agreements" which includes templates for agreements, is available for download from: www.conservancy.bc.ca/ (TLC) or www.ffcf.bc.ca/ (FarmFolk/CityFolk)

IMPORTANT: This article provides general information with the understanding that it is not legal or other professional advice. Please consult the appropriate legal professionals when developing and signing any legal agreement.

Wanda Gorsuch is a contractor, sustainable agriculture projects, and Ramona Scott is the Manager of Agricultural Programs for the Land Conservancy of BC

[1]Modified from Gamble, R.W., 2001. *Land lease arrangements*. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

GIVING BEES THE EDGE:
Provide protection for bees in your buffer zone

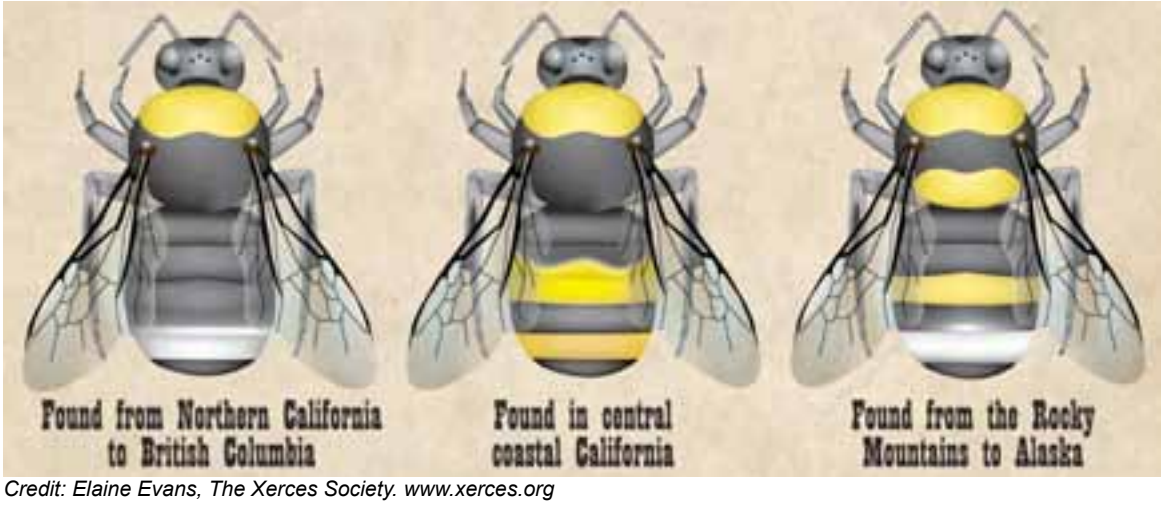
By Stuart McMillan

A central part of the Organic Practices of the new Canadian Organic Standard reads: "Management methods are carefully selected in order to restore and then sustain ecological stability within the enterprise and the surrounding environment. Crop selection and rotation are important for managing nutrient cycling, recycling of plant and animal residues, water management, augmentation of beneficial insects to encourage a balanced predator-prey relationship and the promotion of biological diversity and ecologically based pest management."

Buffers – the strips of land separating organic from non-organic land – are an integral part of organic production. They are required by all certification bodies to prevent contamination through genetic and pesticide drift. Many people think of them as a barrier to "bad" outside products from neighbouring conventional land, but if properly designed, they can serve as a tremendous source of "good" elements for the field, farm, and region as a whole.

When converting to organic production, many farmers often maintain their field boundaries exactly where they were prior to conversion. While on the surface this appears to be simpler than other options, it produces a number of challenges. First of all, if a crop is grown directly to the field edge, the crop in that buffer zone is conventional. It will need to be harvested, stored and marketed separately. Additionally, after harvesting the buffer crop, the equipment used will need to be cleaned prior to the harvest of the rest of the organic crop to prevent commingling. Adequate documentation of these procedures is essential for certification. Even after all this, the producer may be challenged to find a market for a small amount of conventional buffer product.

Because of these challenges many producers opt to seed the buffer with annual or



Credit: Elaine Evans, The Xerces Society. www.xerces.org

Adapted from "10 Most Important Nectar or Pollen Sources in the Major Honey Producing Regions"

P = pollen N = nectar,* = source of pollen or nectar, X = approximate time in flower across BC

Plant Name	P	N	JFMAMJJSOND
Willow	*	*	XXX
Dandelion	*	*	XX
Snowberry		*	XXX
Sweet Clover	*	*	XXX
Alfalfa		*	
XXXX			
Blackberry	*	*	XX
Thistle	*	*	XX
Fireweed	*	*	XXXX

From: *Plants for Beekeeping in Canada* by Jane Ramsay

perennial crops not grown on the farm organically. While this addresses some of the challenges listed above, producers will still find themselves having to document buffer harvests and sales, along with clean-out activities, and possible marketing challenges. Both of these uses of the buffer have additional draw-backs.

To put this into a larger context, it is important to note how the agricultural landscape has become increasingly simplified; abandoned farmsteads cleared away, old field edges removed. This land has been put into production and field size increased. In many intensive agricultural regions these rapidly disappearing areas are the only semi-natural habitat remaining. They contain a mix of introduced plants and the last existing

Pacific Northwest Native Plants for Bees

Aster (Aster)
California poppy (Eschscholzia)
Currant (Ribes)
Elder (Sambucus)
Fireweed (Chamerion)
Goldenrod (Solidago)
Huckleberry (Vaccinium)
Larkspur (Delphinium)
Lupine (Lupinus)
Madrone (Arbutus)
Mint (Mentha)
Oregon grape (Mahonia)
Pacific waterleaf (Hydrophyllum)
Penstemon (Penstemon)
Rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus)
Rhododendron (Rhododendron)
Saskatoon (Amalanchier)
Scorpion-weed (Phacelia)
Snowberry (Symphoricarpos)
Stonecrop (Sedum)
Sunflower (Helianthus)
Wild buckwheat (Eriogonum)
Willow (Salix)
Yarrow (Achillea)

Adapted from "Invertebrate Conservation Fact Sheet: Pacific Northwest Plants for Native Bees" Written by Matthew Shepherd for the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. To view the entire factsheet, please visit: www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/pnw_plants_bees_xerces_society_factsheet1.pdf

native flora and fauna. This biodiversity is increasingly recognized as critical for maintaining threatened animal and insect populations.

While the cause of the recent decline of honey bees continues to be debated, it has been known for a long time that habitat loss, fragmentation of habitat, and modifications to the farm landscape has been negatively affecting pollinators. While the western bumble bee is currently the only listed endangered bee in British Columbia, we lack the knowledge of previous distribution or abundance of most native bees. While bumble bees are the most obvious native pollinators, there are roughly 800 different bee species in Canada. Trying to protect endangered or rare bees is important, but helping the more common bees is also essential since all bees are needing help right now.

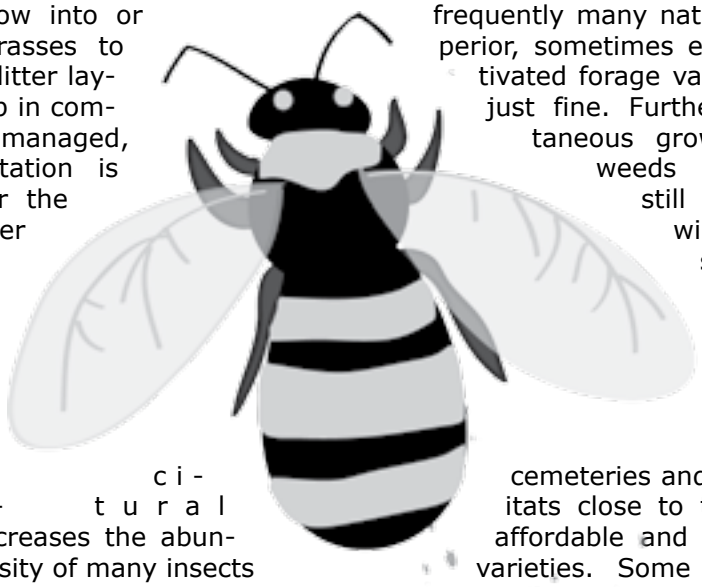
Various methods of preserving and promoting endangered species through alternative agricultural management have been proposed, but adoption in the field has frequently lagged behind. Organic agriculture has a fantastic opportunity to apply some of these strategies in the buffer to enhance overall sustainability.

There is much evidence that vegetation surrounding the cultivated field has many influences on the crop and the diversity of all the life in and around it. The importance of having a wide range of plants for pollinating insects is well known. Some experiments have found that the abundance of many crop pests is lower and the abundance of pest predators is higher at the edges of field compared to the middle. Other studies have shown that as the plant diversity of the field edge increased the diversity of the pollinating insects rose. There are a number of reasons why this may be.

The mixture of plants that can occur in a mature field edge produces essential food resources for beneficial insects. Pollen is a rich protein source, while nectar provides energy rich carbohydrates, both of which only come from flowering plants. Pollen also contains essential amino acids. Plants produce pollen of differing protein contents and nutritional qualities for insects and, of course, at different times of the year when they flower.

Throughout a growing season the changing lifecycles of beneficial insects demand different resources. When a female insect is reproducing, she needs different food that when preparing to overwinter. Lady beetles feed on pollen when insect prey is not available. Hover flies need to consume pollen for proper egg development, along with nectar for energy when adults. Plant nectars from flowers are essential for most butterflies and moths. Of course, nectar and pollen is critical to all bees, both native and tame, throughout their lifecycle. The beneficial insects that may occur on crop edges all have different needs, so encouraging a wide diversity of plants is your best chance of meeting these needs.

The vegetation also provides a moderated micro-climate that influences development, reproduction, egg laying or overwintering success. In this role, maintaining structural diversity is as important as species diversity. Different plants will serve various functions throughout the season. Tufted bunch grasses promote the survival of bumble bees that burrow into or under these grasses to nest. The thick litter layer that builds up in complex, minimally managed, perennial vegetation is very helpful for the survival of other beneficial insects through the winter.



Also, the absence of tillage and other associated agricultural disturbances increases the abundance and diversity of many insects dramatically. Roughly 70% of native bees are ground-dwelling and require undisturbed soil to build their nest cells. The benefits from these practices also applies to decomposers, weed seed eating insects, and the countless neutral insects that may not serve a direct agronomic role, but are important in their own right.

While insects are used as an example here, many of these principles apply to other wildlife such as reptiles, birds and mammals. Field margins can strongly influence the nesting and survival of birds; this is particularly true for ground birds. A wide range of animals can use field boundaries as transportation corridors, either for relocation within the farm or for regional migrations.

By creating a more diverse and permanent buffer strip, other agronomic benefits are realized. Depending on the vegetation present, the buffer may reduce wind velocity and associated crop damage. The reduction of wind may increase snow catch, which is of benefit in drier agricultural areas. It can serve to reduce erosion caused by wind and overland flow of water. It can act as a barrier to nutrient run-off as well. A buffer made up of a mixture of plants will also be a more effective barrier to chemical drift especially if one includes a mix of shrubs and trees into the buffer area.

The creation of a diverse permanent buffer does not have to be expensive. Although frequently many native species are superior, sometimes easily available cultivated forage varieties will function just fine. Furthermore, the spontaneous growth of introduced weeds and native seeds still in the seed bank will also diversify a simple species mix over time. The judicious gathering of seeds from suitable plants occurring along roads, railways, cemeteries and semi-natural habitats close to the fields provides affordable and regionally adapted varieties. Some cost-sharing may even be available from municipal organisations such as soil and water conservation branches, provincial Environmental Farm Plans or other stewardship programmes, or federally through agencies such as the PFRA or Environment Canada.

One reason producers may be reluctant to create a diverse buffer is the loss of cropping land. Some producers may feel the need to maintain some form of revenue from the buffer zone even if it means having the challenges of marketing a conventional crop. Obviously with smaller fields the proportion of area used by the buffer increases, but the benefits created from a diverse buffer zone may well offset the losses in cropping area. Do the benefits from this area outweigh the income generated from it?

This is a question that must be answered by each producer on a case-by-case basis. What is appropriate on one farm may not work on the next. In the Inter-Mountain Grassland or Peace River region the best buffer would mimic the original grasslands with roughly 75% grasses and 25% flowering plants. In areas that were traditionally wooded, having a higher percentage of woody shrubs and trees would be more

appropriate. It is a good idea to maintain a species mixture and not have a totally forested buffer, since many studies have shown that a fully wooded buffer promotes forest specialist insects that are reluctant to leave the buffer into the arable fields. If one is producing orchard crops then it would be advantageous to have a buffer that is predominantly trees and shrubs. Look to the original ecosystem for models to follow in creating an appropriate buffer.

It is equally essential to avoid having plants in the buffers that would serve as alternate hosts of diseases and pests or become weeds in your main crops. If one does choose to apply an organically approved insect or disease control product, care should be taken to avoid damaging pollinators since some organically approved products also affect bees. You should learn what are the habitat preferences or requires species for the main pests on your operation and avoid those species. Some initial research and planning can go a long way in avoiding future difficulties.

Each farm is different and requires a unique solution. What is universal is that a well-designed buffer must provide multiple benefits on an environmental, agronomic, and economic level. Buffers should promote biodiversity, which is as much a part of organic certification as is creating a buffer to exclude prohibited substances.

Further Information

Xerces Society – www.xerces.org
Pollination Canada – www.seeds.ca/proj/poll/index.php?n=pc_home
Wild Farm Alliance – www.wildfarmalliance.org/index.htm

Stuart McMillan works as an organic inspector in MB and frequently can be found in a field with his nose in a flower or close to the ground. He welcomes questions, feedback or criticism at organicinsp@gmail.com.

Earlier versions of this article appeared in the Winter 2007 issue of the Canadian Organic Grower*, www.cog.ca/magazineissues.htm, and* In Good Tilth Magazine *(Issue 18iii), www.tilth.org.*

... Continued from page 15

more moisture. At the Snider farm, they work the green manure four inches into the soil and disc it once more if required. In Steve's afternoon session on intercropping he mentioned that at Little Red Hen Mill they always intercrop a legume with a cereal. Care is required to match the crops in days to maturity.

The second morning speaker was Heather Deegan, a nutritionist from Interior Health. Heather's current position pertains to food security with a focus on local food production.
She discussed the challenges many local families face with obtaining safe wholesome food. A lively discussion transpired, as participants related to the ways some government policies have made local food production more difficult (i.e. closing of local slaughter houses). Heather noted the shift of the Ministry of Health's thinking toward true prevention of disease and promoting of consumer health, and cited her recently developed position as an example. Those attending asked many important questions of Heather.

Following Steve's afternoon discussion on intercropping, Andrea Gunner spoke about the social and economic benefits of local food production. She noted how the communities of Salmon Arm and Armstrong are working to aid in developing family/community garden skill sets. Participants not only learn how to build, plant, and harvest their gardens but are also taught to preserve the vegetables they have grown.

Potential and current organic grain farmers attended as did interested consumers, neighbors, along with some local politicians – Huguette Allen, Green Party, and Colin Mayes, Federal Liberal Party. Wonderful tasty and nutritious spelt breads, crackers, dips were produced and provided by Ushi Eder of Enderby, coffee by Shuswap Coffee Company and cheese from Gort's Organic Gouda.

People Points

Growing People

Now that you have spent months focused on growing plants and animals it is time to begin to think about growing another vital crop: *you and your employees*. You have seen the results of providing good soil, proper light and water for your plants and animals. Learning new skills or providing professional development to an employee is like adding a fresh bucket of compost – new growth happens right before your eyes. Farmers and business owners need to "nourish" the people around them, including themselves, to promote individual development and ultimately healthy business growth.

How can we take classes when we live so far away or don't have time during the day?

Learning is not what it used to be. Courses are offered long-distance using the internet, or in the classroom on a weekly or monthly basis. Often a local workshop or seminar can spark new ideas. Some education centers offer certificate or diploma programs that you complete at your own pace over a year or more.

What would you and your staff learn about?

- Increase sales by learning how to negotiate better, or new ways to market your product.
- Ramp up office efficiency with additional Word, Excel or email system courses.
- Take the mystery out of accounting and finances with bookkeeping, payroll or tax classes.
- Improve productivity by learning how to motivate & retain employees.
- Develop a positive, strong work-team by adding to your communication & conflict resolution skills.
- Strengthen your team's toolbelt with small mechanic repair or first-aid classes.

Isn't it all expensive?

There is a range to choose from: local workshops and seminars might be $40, courses at your local college or on-line can vary from $90 to $200, and up to $500 or more. Remember, some classes can be claimed as a tax deduction as long as you have the receipt.

What are your options?

- Local colleges, Employment Offices, Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures branches often provide reasonably priced training seminars.
- Organic Farming Institute of BC: www.ofibc.org
- Kwantlen School of Horticulture (Langley): www.kwantlen.bc.ca/hort.html
- UBC website: www.elearning.ubc.ca/home/index.cfm
- Thompson River University: http://my2.bcou.ca/register/zwskfcls.p_getcrse
- BCIT website: www.bcit.ca/study/courses
- The COABC Education webpage www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/education/list.php has links to a wide variety of learning options.
- Type "on-line learning BC" into a search engine and the sky's the limit!

As a last thought, don't leave your body out of the "growth" plan. Consider attending yoga, pilates, tae-kwon-doe or weight training sessions to help reduce aches and pains, and build or maintain muscle. These can also help manage the "winter blues" and keep you motivated. Keep fresh learn something new today!

Karen Fenske, President
StratPoint Solutions
www.stratpoint.ca/

Events and Announcements...

The **Canadian Food Inspection Agency** has posted Questions and Answers on the *2009 Organic Products Regulations* online at: www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/orgbio/quest2e.shtml

The ***Canadian Agricultural Loans Act* (CALA) program** is a financial loan guarantee program that gives farmers easier access to credit. Farmers can use these loans to establish, improve, and develop farms; while Agricultural co-operatives may also access loans to process, distribute, or market the products of farming. For more information contact your financial institution, call the CALA toll-free line at 1-888-346-2511 or e-mail fgp-pgf@agr.gc.ca.

The **New Code of Practice** for the care and handling of dairy cattle is now available from the **National Farm Animal Care Council.** For most organic producers there should not be any surprises, but it maybe excellent review to make sure all considerations have been given to do the best for your animals. Of course, some acceptable practices that are listed are not acceptable under the organic banner so be careful not to confuse what is not acceptable in organic systems, but still allowed under the code. Visit www.nfacc.ca.

The **Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada** Animal Welfare Taskforce has created three new factsheets: management of pest flies on organic farms, raising calves on organic dairy farms, and control of lice and mange mites in cattle. They can be downloaded at www.oacc.info/AnimalWelfare/aw_task_force.asp

The **Canadian Farm Business Management Council** (CFBMC), in partnership with the **B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Business Development Program** and the **Small Scale Food Processor Association,** is holding two-day workshops at 6 locations across the province that are suited to anyone wanting to start a new farm related enterprise or to diversify an existing operation. For more information, or to register contact the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands at 604-556-3057 or email Jennifer.Curtis@gov.bc.ca.

FALL SEMINAR SERIES

Sponsored by COABC

As part of our service to growers to provide educational opportunities, COABC and BC's Organic Extension Services are planning a *Fall Seminar Series*, to take place in November. We are working with international speakers to present sessions on:

- Stockfree (animal free) organic vegetable production, achieved using green manures and crop rotations.
- Innovative concepts and techniques for successful weed management in organic cropping.

Watch for more details about these and other informative seminars on e-news, the listserv and on the COABC events website at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/infonews/events.php.

Bindweed Support Group

Are you a field bindweed sufferer? Do you suffer in silence? Did you just wake up one morning and it was there? Have you been ignoring the signs?

Contact Rochelle Eisen 250-547-6573
extension@certifiedorganic.bc.ca
to join the...

Field Bindweed Sufferers Society (FBSS)

An informal approach to a serious problem – you don't have to feel alone anymore!

CLASSIFIEDS

Cedar Posts - Various sizes from 6 feet to 12 feet. Price ranges from 4.50 to 14.50 per post. Balsam Fir Planks 2 X 10 X 10 or 2 X 12 X 10 for cold frames. Everhard Franke, Box 168, McBride, B.C. V0J 2E0
Ph # 250-569-2677, E-Mail: yungen@telus.net

COABC

ORDER FORM

202-3002 32nd Avenue, Vernon, BC V1T 2L7; p: 250 .260.4429; f: 250.260.4436; assistant@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Enterprise Name: _____
Contact: _____
Address: _____
City/Province: _____
Postal Code: _____
Phone: _____
Date ordered: _____
CB + Certification No.: _____

PST Exemption

☐ BCAC Farmer ID Card #: _____
If no BCAC Farmer ID #:

☐ Certificate of Exemption must be provided for PST Exemption for each purchase. Form available at: www.sbr.gov.bc.ca/documents_library/forms/0453FILL.pdf or request the form from the office.

Item	Units	Unit Price	Quantity Discount	Quantity	Total
Plastic 10 lb apple bags/vented	250/wicket	$12.00	4 wickets $40.00		
Stickers 1" round	1000 pc roll	$12.50	10 rolls $108.00		
Stickers 1 1/4" square	1000 pc roll	$10.50	10 rolls $90.00		
Twist Ties 10" (15,000 per case)*	1000 pc	$13.00	Full Case-$165.00		

The packaging materials above are only available to COABC Certified Organic members.
Have you signed a new Consent to use Official Marks Declaration Form (revised July 2006)? Y/N
Have all your labels been reviewed by your CB? Y/N
With which products will you be using the packaging materials?_____

Promo Materials: available to everyone	Member $	Non-member $			
Bucket Hats size M or L *	$15.75	$15.75	PST taxable		
Ball Caps	$13.10	$13.10	PST taxable		
Green T-shirts L or XL *	$18.00	$18.00	PST taxable		
Natural T-shirts (Logo) M or L*	$7.25	$7.25	PST taxable		
Natural T-shirts (Plain) S M L XL or XXL	$5.00	$5.00	PST taxable		
Organic Tree Fruit Management	$32.00	$39.95	No PST		
Steel in the Field *	$25.00	$25.00	No PST		
Livestock Nutrition *	$12.00	$12.00	No PST		
			Sub-total (before taxes and shipping):		

*Limited quantities available - please contact the COABC office for availability GST # 887782431 RT 0001

Postage Rates

Minimum charge of $10.00 per order for any promo and/or packaging materials
GST will be added to postage amounts
Rates vary and will be calculated at the office

An invoice will be sent with your order. Postage and applicable taxes will be added to your invoice.
Please do not send payment before receiving invoice.

COABC CONFERENCE & AGM

Kamloops 2010
March 5th – 7th

Learn with workshops and presentations. **Connect** with other organic producers and processors. **Share** knowledge, stories and solutions to build a stronger organic community.

Save the date and make a plan to attend the 2010 COABC Annual Conference and AGM!

COABC SPONSORSHIP PARTNERS

left coast NATURALS

THRIFTY FOODS™

INDIGO natural products management

the Organic Grocer

B.C. BRAND

PROorganics

A SunOpta Company

Want to sponsor an organization that supports a healthy environment, healthy people, healthy animals and a healthy economy? COABC sponsorship opportunities are available. Your sponsorship dollars go toward supporting education for organic producers and processors through Seminars, Cyberhelp, the COABC website, Conference and this magazine. For further information please contact the COABC administrator, Sarah Clark at admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca