# British Columbia Organic Grower

## In this Issue:


Thinking Seeds

Fresh Voices

GE Seeds Update

Rabbit River Farms

Flea Beetle Solutions


COABC
Certified Organic Associations of BC


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## Correction

In the article "Getting Started with Organic Blueberry Production (Winter, 2010 Vol 13, Issue 1) the author stated that there are only 6 blueberry producers listed on the COABC website, whereas there are actually over 40 producers.




## BC Organic Grower

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**On the Cover:** Patrick Steiner (of Stellar Seeds) screening seeds. Credit: Nicha Rakpanichmanee

**Layout & Design:** Moss Dance, Rainbow Raven Design
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**Next Issue Deadline: June 2nd, 2010**

# President's Letter

*By Brad Reid*

Spring has sprung and everyone is busy. After such a mild winter we are all hoping that we will get an early jump on planting and are looking forward to a great crop year.

The AGM in Kamloops was very well attended and everyone had a great time and an informative weekend. I would like to thank all of the volunteers and workers that made the conference such a success. A special note and thanks to Moss Dance (our BCOG designer) for the great music Friday night. The Blues Jumpers Band on Saturday were also awesome with lots of people dancing and having a great time.

We will build on this and make next year's gathering even bigger and better. A special thanks to Sarah, Brigitte Rozema, Rob, Rochelle, Kristy, Moss and Nancy Plett our conference coordinator for all of their hard work to bring it all together. Big thanks to Mary Forstbauer for the work on the silent auction.

Welcome to all of the new and returning directors to the COABC board. Our first meeting was a long one. However I feel we have a great group that has the best interest of the organic industry in BC at heart.

The board of directors (BOD) will be working hard to secure stable funding, so that the COABC can operate into a future that doesn't involve higher fees. Other activities of the BOD will be to continue to implement the organic strategic plan (which can be found on our website), to create stable funding for the Organic Extension Agent, continue to work to improve communications at all levels of our industry, and to liaise with all levels of government to promote the organic model of farming.

We have a lot of challenges to overcome this year and I am sure that with our staff, contractors, volunteers, and new board we will meet them head on. We need the support of all organic growers, processors, wholesalers, and retailers to meet these challenges, so let's stand together and make organic food production all that it can be. "Many hands make light work," as the saying goes, so even if you only have a little extra time to volunteer, it all helps.

Respectfully,
Brad Reid

# COABC 2010 Board of Directors

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# Report from the Administrator

*By Sarah Clark*

Winter, I have discovered, is the busy season for the COABC office. It is a time of activity and educational opportunities, as we provide the conference and webinar sessions, as well as reporting on the previous year's actions and planning for the year.

Before looking forward I must look back and thank everyone from office staff and contractors to all the sponsors and donors that helped to make the annual conference a success. Without your input and support it would not be possible. Thank you!

As spring brings growth to the land so it does to the COABC office. The focus for the office moves to the actions identified at the November planning session. Such actions include the following: working to secure funding for extension services; further work on regulating the word "organic;" communications to promote the BC Certified Organic Program and Checkmark logo; drafting COABC position papers; highlighting organic grower success stories on the website; and ensuring sustainability for many of the programs we oversee like this magazine and Cyberhelp.

Advocacy, Capacity Development and the BCCOP campaign committees are looking for help. Interested? Have a question? Contact me at admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca to find out more.

# Editor's Note *by Andrea Langlois*

*Andrea Langlois, Editor*

Spring can be a time of looking back, and of looking forward, both of which are represented in this issue. This issue reflects back on the past year and specifically on the COABC annual conference and AGM, with photos and a review.

This year's Fresh Voices contest is also behind us, with the two entries featured here in the BCOG, both of which have interesting ideas to add to discussions on how to build and maintain soil fertility.

And, as the soil warms, planning is at the centre of many growers' lives. This issue includes a feature article from Colleen O'Brien and Patrick Steiner from Stellar Seeds that calls to growers to start growing some of their own seeds. The article includes tips on saving seeds from three crops as a starting point to join the movement to reduce the pressure on seed supplies.

*Moss Dance Layout and Ad Desk*

For organic growers planning also means documenting. We are pleased to include a sneak peak into COG's upcoming practical skills handbook / Record Keeping for Organic Growers/. The excerpt included here will help you get started this year with helpful tips on how to keep a farm journal.

From seed saving to tips on how to deal with those pesky flea beetles, this issue is full of information will help germinate new ideas that I hope will help you have an organized and productive growing season.


# Quick Return Compost Making

## The Essence of the Sustainable Organic Garden

*By Andrew E. Davenport*

By Robin Wheeler

Andrew Davenport's British community is not that different from many others. In this book he brings attention to the persistent question of new gardeners: "How can I make good compost?"

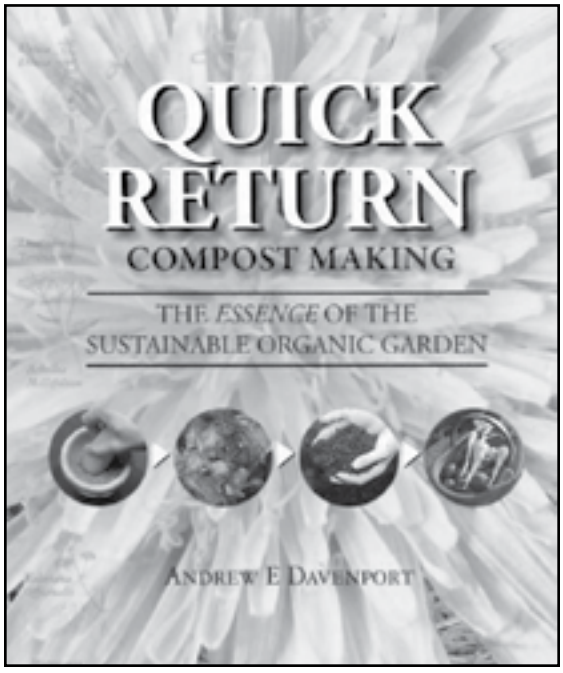
This book is his response to that question. But Mr. Davenport is a clear fan of the historic Maye Emily Bruce, who in 1935 created a magical biodynamic elixir she named the Quick Return Activator. She spent the better part of her life teaching others about its powers. In this book, Davenport gives much room to this intriguing method.

Where Rudolph Steiner encouraged a more complex biodynamic system, Maye Emily Bruce was much more pragmatic in her instruction. Out went the ram's horn and moon planting, in came a more direct approach, including growing our activator herbs ourselves. Davenport steers us easily between the magic of Bruce's flower essences and the science of the compost heap. He includes plenty of photos of several composting styles and how to create them, including some new to me, all very doable even on a very small scale.

This book would be interesting to those avoiding animal products on their farms, such as those using a vegan model of farming. And permaculturists will love growing their own plant elixir.

Davenport is enthusiastic and thorough in his descriptions. He gives good detail on the growing and harvesting of the activator ingredients and how to make our own activator. He offers many tips, not just for the new compost, but some unexpected uses for our new herb beds as well (valerian tincture for dandruff!).

My complaints of this book are few. The text is small (but oh so efficiently packed!) and for some there may be a painful amount of history on Maye Emily Bruce – though I do appreciate seeing an organic pioneer




getting credit for her great ideas and perseverance. This is not so much a book for a large farm as one for the generous family garden or the dedicated do-it-yourselfer.

Although an avid mulcher, I am a pathetic composter. Davenport got me excited about trying his methods in my own extensive gardens. And I have some new uses for my herb garden now, too!

The book is sold by traders on Amazon.ca or readers can also order directly from us at QR Composting Solutions by sending a payment of $21 Cdn. by Paypal to queries@qrcompostingsolutions.co.uk and stating the code BCORG. Please note that this is a special discounted price for readers of the BC Organic Grower and includes post and packing.

*Robin Wheeler is owner of Edible Landscapes on the Sunshine Coast, and author of* Gardening for the Faint of Heart *and* Food Security for the Faint of Heart*.* www.ediblelandscapes.ca

# Dear Rochelle

by Rochelle Eisen

With 2010 being a watershed year for the BC's Organic Extension Services I thought I would commandeer my Dear Rochelle space to talk about extension services.

Since September 2007 with funding secured by the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia from the BC Ministry of Agriculture, I have supplied organic extension services in BC, with support from the COABC's Office Team, BC Ministry Agriculture specialists, Canadian Agriculture researchers along with extension agents and crop specialists from other provinces.

## Organic Extension in BC is helping to:

√ **Sustain local food production by:**

- Reducing our carbon footprint
- Building rural / urban agriculture community
- Creating farming opportunities and jobs
- Stimulating local economies

√ **Level the playing field with our USA counterparts, Washington State for example, who:**

- Receive certification fee subsidies (up to $750/yr)
- Have access to over 40 state scientists doing pertinent research, and 7 state extension agents

√ **Deliver healthy nutrient rich food, which:**

- Improves the health of BC citizens
- Reduces everyone's exposure to pesticides
- Minimizes our impact on our air, land and water
- Diminishes our need for expensive health services

### How are Organic Extension Services helping organic farming in BC?

Every year, the OEA (organic extension agent) answers hundreds of phone calls from organic farmers, processors, and distributors. Over half of the queries come from people not already involved in organic agriculture. A key role has been to assist BC in adapting to the new federal regulation and guidelines.

Additionally, the OEA plays key roles in maintaining the high quality of COABC communications via the BC Organic Grower magazine, seminars, Webinars (the only of their kind in BC), COABC's Annual Conference and various workshops.

The OEA is one of BC's representatives on the Technical Committee of the Canadian General Standards Board Committee on Organic Agriculture and on the Processing and Greenhouse Working Groups. The OEA also represents BC nationally on the Capacity Building subcommittee of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Organic Value Chain Roundtable and serves on the Expert Committee on Organic Agriculture as well as contributes to a cross-country Organic Extension Agent Committee. The OEA participates in the federal provincial Minor Use Pesticide process (Health Canada, PMRA), which fosters relationships with researchers interested in doing research of interest.

Closer to home, the OEA contributes to the BC's Organic Sector strategic planning process as well as the COABC's strategic and operational planning process and has built relationships with and contributed an organic perspective to educational post-secondary institutions, including UBC and the UBC Farm, Kwantlen University and the University College of the Fraser Valley.

The OAE plays several roles in BC Organic conferences, trade shows and other regional educational events and venues by

presenting, moderating or facilitating. Extension Needs Surveys are conducted to assess operator information and priorities (field bindweed, poultry training etc) and through other feedback loops which helps identify educational and knowledge gaps, then strategizes on how to address those issues and communicates this information to researchers/scientists.

Clearly, the BC Organic Extension Agent is a role that has proven to be effective in supporting organic agriculture in this time of great change and opportunity. The OEA plays a key role in communications, capacity-building and strategic planning, integrating the research and information needs of BC producers, processors and distributors with the services available via BCMAL, AAFC (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), universities and electronic resources.

Organic Extension increases organic production in BC by helping current organic producers overcome barriers, by supporting non-organic producers to move to organics, as well as helping all producers to employ organic solutions to their problems. If anyone is central and key to the organic movement in BC, it is our Organic Extension Agent, and the loss of this position would constitute a major setback to organics and an obstacle to continuing growth of organic food production in BC.

Unfortunately the money that, up to now, supported this province-wide service is running out August 30, 2010 and so far the COABC has been unable to replenish the pot.

To maintain 80% of what services already in place requires $100,000 per annum. With an additional $50,000 annually, all the above functions including the cost of a part-time assistant would be covered.

I believe the continued need for a knowledgeable, fully-funded and inspired organic extension-type service is a critical component of the BC Organic infrastructure needed to meet the demands of farmers converting to organic production and those already practicing, especially since the implementation of the new federal regulation.

There are more hurdles to jump in the next two years as the federal Stream of Commerce period (the 2-year adaptation period following the implementation date of June 30, 2009 for the federal Organic Product Regulation) comes to an end in June 2011 and as BC continues to explore modifying its legislation to require mandatory certification for organic claims made within the province and as the COABC continues to explore methods of broadening its membership base. All of these will increase demand for extension services in BC.

If you have any ideas on how we can rally the funds or even inspire those in our organics movement, get in contact with Rochelle 250.499.2413 or extension@certifiedorganic.bc.ca. Readers should also keep in mind this article was written in mid-March and it is possible by the publication date the situation may have changed. Please do feel free to check in with Rochelle for an update on the situation.

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1 In 2009 the OEA fielded questions from 860 farmers, processors, and distributors and approximately 850 requests for assistance from various support people such as suppliers, industry representatives, crop specialists and consultants. From September 2007 (beginning of the position) through Jan 2010 the OEA has handled a total of 3,750 enquiries (over 1900 from farmers etc, and the balance from the support sector). If enquiries continue to increase at the same rate 1890 enquiries will be handled in '09-'10.

# Thinking

*Harvesting flower seed by hand.*
*Credit: Nicha Rakpanichmanee*

## There is no better time to start planning your seed growing than right now.

*By Colleen O'Brien & Patrick Steiner*

News of worldwide shortages of some vegetable seed varieties, the introduction of new GMO vegetable cultivars, and the ongoing consolidation of the world's seed industry have many farmers planning to produce seed from some of their favourite open-pollinated crops. They'll use these seeds on their farms, trade them with friends, or maybe even sell to companies looking for organic seed.

For farmers who already have an understanding of what it takes to grow high quality crops, producing high quality seed crops is not a big leap. All the same conditions of maintaining good quality soil, watering adequately, reducing weed and pest pressure, and spacing crops are key to producing seeds.

The plants do all the work for the most part because they are biologically driven to reproduce. As farmers, we just tend them a little longer than we would if we were harvesting them as a food crop. Good observation of your crop and common sense are the most important factors in determining how a seed crop is progressing and when it is ready for harvest. With each season of growing seeds, a farmer will gain experiences that serve them well in the following seasons – there is no substitute for one's own experience growing, harvesting, or cleaning seeds. Many of the skills learned in producing seeds of one kind of crop are transferrable to other crops.

There is no better time to start planning your seed growing than right now. It is still early spring and there is ample time to consider what you will produce for seed this year, and to start planning where, and when, to grow it. I recommend starting small, with only one or a few seed crops. Trying to grow too many types of seed, on top of all the other farm work most of us have, will dilute your focus and lower the chance of success. In this case, less truly is more. Grow only a few seeds, but do them well.

# Seeds

British Columbia's varied geography and climate can produce many kinds of good quality seed crops. Peas, beans and brassica greens grow well in many parts of the province. As these are popular summer eating with people across the province, many market farmers produce a lot of all these crops. It is easy to successfully save seed from them in BC. The rest of this article outlines the basics of how to save seeds from these three crops.

*Carrot flower umbells.* *Credit: Colleen O'Brien*

## Peas

For good fruit, set, and a high seed yield, plant peas in the ground early, as you would for market production. Build trellises for the peas, as having the vines and fruits in the air allows for more air flow and sunlight to reach them, reducing fungal diseases, pest attack, and, critically, facilitates the drying of the mature peas and pods for seed harvest.

At Stellar Seeds, we plant our peas in beds with a trellis down the middle and two rows of peas on each side of the trellis - fairly snug to the trellis so they can all reach the support. Once the peas have fruited, do not be tempted to pick them. Leave everything untouched and they will develop fully in the pods and begin to dry down.

Once the pods become papery-dry to the touch and yellow-brown in colour, you can open some up to test for the pea seed ripeness. Peas should have dried down inside the pod when ready for harvest. To test, try to dent a pea seed with your fingernail or with your teeth. If the seed is hard enough, it will not squish between your teeth, but crack in half.

If they are still a little soft, either leave them until they are hard, or harvest the whole vine and hang somewhere to allow the peas to finish drying down. This will not reduce seed quality as long as they were mature and had started drying down before you pick them. We often harvest our pea vines and then hang them from the trellises in the field for another week to let them fully dry.

After the peas are dry, cleaning them is easy. Lay the dried pea vines on a tarp and begin stepping on them. This action will pop open the peapods, freeing the peas. They are hard enough that they will not be damaged.

Pea seeds are heavy and a quick mussing up of the pile of chaffe and pea seed mixture will allow peas to sink to the bottom. You can then pull of 90% of the chaffe by hand. The rest of the chaffe/seed mixture can be poured through a 1/2" metal screen (available at hardware stores). This will get rid of still more chaffe, leaving you with a mixture of seeds and fine, dusty chaffe.

Using a fan (or stiff breeze if one is available) pour your seeds in front of the air flow, capturing them in a bucket below. This will clean the rest of your chaffe away, leaving you with perfectly clean seed. We use a simple 18" oscillating fan for most

*Stomping pea seed to release from pods.*
*Credit: Colleen O'Brien*

of our seed cleaning work, and a selection of tarps, buckets, and screens. With these low-tech tools we clean a wide variety of different seed crops in a short time. You don't need to invest in expensive machinery in order to be able to clean seeds well and efficiently.

Peas are self-pollinating with very little chance of crossing, which makes successful seed-saving even easier. For your own use, you probably don't have to worry too much about isolation distance while still expecting things to be true to type. If selling seed or trading with others observing an isolation distance of 50 feet from other peas ensures no crossing.

## Beans

Bean seed is produced in much the same way as pea seed. Obviously, the planting date is a little later, once the soil has warmed more and there is no danger of frost. These instructions are for the production of typical fresh or dry bush beans, *phaseolus vulgaris*.

*Harvesting cress seed.*
*Credit: Nicha Rakpanichmanee*

Once you've planted and grown the crop as you would for market, do the same as with peas and resist picking bean pods. If you pick a few harvests from your plants and decide to save the later flush of beans for seed, you will find that the growing season will not be long enough and most of them will not have enough time to fully mature and produce seed. This is why I recommend not harvesting at all from the peas and beans you've set aside for seed production.

Follow all the same rules for harvest and determining maturity you would with peas, and the exact same rules for cleaning. It's that simple.

Bush beans are self-pollinating with very little chance of crossing. If selling seeds, observe an isolation distance of 30 feet from other *phaseolus vulgaris* beans to ensure trueness-to-type. Bush beans are a different species than runner beans and soybeans and no crossing will occur. This means you could grow a bush bean and soybean side-by-side with no crossing possibility. Take note seedsavers!

## Brassicas

There are many types of brassicas grown by farmers and gardeners across British Columbia. We'll focus here on seed production techniques for common leafy brassicas that are used for salad mixes or bunched greens.

You can produce these plants either by direct-seeding or through transplants. While all my market production is started by direct seeding, I prefer to start my brassica seed crops with transplants. This is so that when I put out the seedlings I can space them appropriately and have a known-quantity when it comes to plant size, vigour, shape, etc. If I direct seed these crops, I have found that with the busyness of spring, it is difficult to get them thinned on time and to see each plant grow into its ideal shape and size before producing seeds, which is important.

You always want to see a plant at its full size before it blooms and produces seeds in order to gauge if it is good enough quality to harvest seeds from. If you have rows of small, tightly packed brassica greens that might be good for cut-and-come-again market culture, it's difficult to say with authority that they would look good as an adult plant. When brassica greens are full-sized and producing seed stalks each plant is 2 feet in diameter and approximately 3 feet high. They need space! We transplant all our brassica greens on 20" centres, 3 rows to a bed. Even then they are jam packed when in full flower or seed production mode.

As the brassica greens develop flower stalks and get tall they will also start to flop over. This can cause stalks to crack off at the base of the plant with reduction in seed yields. We use stakes along the outsides of the bed with twine run from one to the other to act as supports for the plants and keep them upright. This also leaves your aisles free for you to walk down, which otherwise becomes impossible if brassica greens flop over. As with peas, it also means sunlight and airflow improve the quality of your seedcrop and help in the drying down process.

*Mixed seed crop. Credit: Colleen O'Brien*

Like peas and beans, brassica seeds are also housed in pods, just smaller. They will line the stalks of the plant, with literally hundreds (thousands?) of pods on each plant. As they mature they will turn from green to yellow to papery-brown and become brittle. You can open pods to look at the seed development inside. Many brassica seeds will go a deep black when ripe. If they are still coloured or pale they are not mature.

One danger with brassica seedpods is their tendency to shatter when ripe or over-ripe, resulting in seed spilling onto the soil and being essentially unharvestable. So keep an eye on ripening brassicas and harvest as soon as ripe. You don't want to pick them under-ripe the way you can with peas and beans because seed doesn't ripen after harvest as much, and seed quality will be reduced.

But if most of the pods are ready and a few aren't, you can harvest the whole plant and lay it on the ground, windrowed with the pods facing the sun. Then when the pods are dry, clean them same way as peas and beans by laying seed heads on a tarp and stepping on them. Again, seeds are hard enough not to be damaged this way. Screen through a finer screen than the peas and beans to get rid of most of your chaffe, then pour this mixture in front of a fan to get perfectly clean seed. A little practice and you'll be a pro.

Brassicas are cross-pollinating so observing isolation distances is critical for seed production. Aside from caging (not practical on most working farms), this is the only way to ensure seed that is true-to-type. How do you determine appropriate isolation distances and which brassicas will cross with others? There isn't a quick answer, but essentially if a plant shares the same Genus species then it will cross with anything else in that Genus species. Getting to know botanical names for plants is important for seedsavers. Most farms can realistically only produce seeds for one brassica crop in any given species each year. This is because isolation distances tend to be close to 1 km for these crops. With planning, a grower can produce seeds from several brassicas in a year, as long as they are all from different species.

Good references that outline the botanical names and isolation distances for most major crops are *How to Save Your Own Seeds* by Seeds of Diversity Canada and *Seed to Seed* by Suzanne Ashworth. These are also great reads for answering basic and advanced questions on seedsaving.

*Patrick Steiner and Colleen O'Brien farm in Sorrento and operate Stellar Seeds. Patrick's handbook,* Small Scale Organic Seed Production *can be purchased from FarmFolk/CityFolk at* admin@ffcf.bc.ca

# Untangling Growers' Responses to the Field Bindweed Survey

By Rochelle Eisen

## Who responded?

A total of 28 responses were received, 24 of those from organic producers. Most were vegetable producers, some fruit producers (tree, berry, grape) and a smattering of grain, forage, seed and herb producers. Twenty-six of the participants had field bindweed on their farms.

## What did they say?

**Do you consider field bindweed a problem on your farm? Does it reduce your production? Does it impact your yield or production quality? (i.e., does it have an economic impact on your operation?)**

There were 17 comments submitted in response to this open-ended question. Two respondents said it wasn't a problem as they could control it, with the remaining 15 making it very clear that field bindweed was having an impact on various aspects of their operations. In most instances the impact was increased labour and weeding expenses; and in some cases crop quality was being compromised, particularly for grape, grain and cut flower producers.

64% felt they could not stop it from spreading no matter the soil type or the level of compaction. One person mentioned that the bindweed was not as bad in a non-irrigated sandy area while everyone else didn't feel irrigation or lack there of was a factor.

A significant number of respondents mentioned that on their farms field bindweed was more evident in hedgerows, and along fence lines where they did not cultivate regularly, but than others mentioned it didn't seem to matter if they were cultivating or not.

A number of operators mentioned that they have switched from perennial to intensive annual production so they could cultivate more frequently to stay ahead of the bindweed (someone mentioning cultivating every second day). A few mentioned they had abandoned certain areas of their farms to avoid the field bindweed. Others said that they had switched to using transplants, as direct seeded crops couldn't keep ahead of the bindweed; another switched away from any trellised cropping systems. Some were working with various mulching materials to help get ahead of the bindweed.

**Do you know how these areas initially got infested? If yes, please explain. For example, transported in soil or manure, brought in on machinery, was already present when production began, etc.**

A third of respondents said it was already on their properties when they purchased; another third felt they brought it onto their farm in loads of manure or purchased poorly composted materials. One person even mentioned they thought it had come in on a load of straw, another felt it had arrived in a load of gravel, another with some nursery stock. Another felt it was creeping in from the property edges.

Only 27% of respondents could estimate crop and income losses and unfortunately the question was faulty as it did not ask on a per acre basis, making it impossible to come up with per acre rate of loss. Some mentioned $10,000 a year as a rough figure. But overall most operators

*Continued on page 29...*

# LOW TECH FLEA BEETLE TRAPPING AND MONITORING

By Dave McCandless

The idea is simple. When flea beetles hop, slide something sticky under them and take them away. Really that says it all. After you've got this down, you can let your ideas take over and have fun.

## The Contraption

I started with a light sheet of aluminum that came from the neighbourhood printing press, some cord and some honey. It has worked well.

The sled is quite light so that it floats over the tender plants. The leading edge is wrapped around a light-weight bar which stiffens the front edge and makes it rounded to prevent plant damage.

Like a sled, a tow cord is attached to it but put the cord through some light weight pipe for one-handed steering. A "jump" bar in the very front (not really necessary) makes the beetles jump and serves as a non-sticky carrying handle. It also helps to stiffen the side panels. These panels are worth it because they trap beetles that jump sideways.

A ten-by-ten centimetre grid drawn onto the sticky surface allows for population analysis.

## The Sticky Stuff

I've only tried honey with any success. Cane syrup wasn't as sticky. Liquid honey is pretty uniform and you can buy it in soft plastic squirt bottles. I use a small paint roller to spread it evenly. You can clean off the honey and beetles with a kettle of boiling water. Remember to apply honey to the insides of the side panels too!

## Sweeping

Start late in the morning when the crop isn't too wet and the beetles have climbed the plants to feed. I don't think they like strong wind or cold, so weather is important.

Simply tow the sled over the crop at a steady pace. If you catch most of them near the trailing edge of the sled, try slowing down a bit. My rate is about 160 feet/min.

For brassica salad greens that are fairly densely planted, sweep from first germination to about seven or eight inches high.

Cole transplants are more easily damaged by the sled due to spacing.

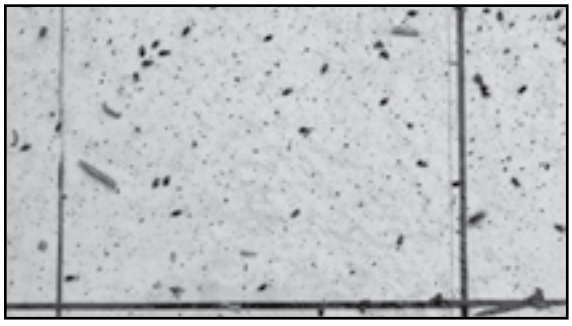
## Cleaning off Your Catch

Remember that you have a seething mass of live flea beetles stuck to the surface and some may be able to jump free, so have an escape route worked out for you and your sled.

It's best to have a source of boiling hot water in the field. Rinse off the beetles with the hot water and they will be killed right away and the sled will be ready for its next journey through the fields. It will dry in an instant.

## Monitoring

I like this part – you can see what you've caught! The grid drawn onto the trapping surface can be used to can count beetles in a square, or you can take digital photos to create a record.



Choose which square usually gets an average number of beetles stuck to it. Focus on that one every time for your comparisons.

The goal is to drastically reduce the population! The yield per sweep seems to plateau but the first pass each day is the best.

The sled also catches other species, so you can see what else is there.

## Learn about Flea Beetles

Learning about the reproductive cycles of flea beetles and their behaviors will help you.

When do they lay eggs? Hit them hard before that. What makes them jump? Do they jump away from a disturbance? Can they change direction in the air? Do I scare them? the sled? Both? How long after being disturbed are they up there feeding again?

Good luck and happy sweeping!

*Dave McCandless is a retired organic farmer and is a member of the Glorious Organics Coop and Fraser Common Farm Coop.*

## GREENBYTES...

### Organic is LESS

**Organic production practices:**

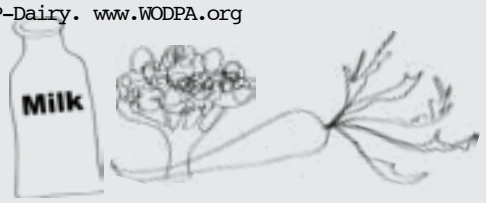
1. Use less fossil fuel.
2. Use fewer pesticides, antibiotics, hormones.
3. Result in less run-off of nitrogen and water from land.

### Organic is MORE

**Organic foods have:**

1. More Omega-3.
2. More conjugated linoleic acid.
3. More Vitamins A, D, E.
4. More beta-carotene.
5. More antioxidants.

From: One of the Organic Dairy Advantages: Part 1. More Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acid Marguerita B. Cattell, DVM, MS Diplomate, ABVP-Dairy, Arden J. Nelson, DVM, Diplomate, ABVP-Dairy. www.WODPA.org



# FARMER FOCUS

# Rabbit River Farms

*Steve Easterbfook with a happy hen*

By Spring Gillard

As a child, **Steve Easterbrook** and a friend paid regular visits to a neighbour up the street in rural Burnaby; the sometimes grumpy old man had an aviary. In spite of being a grump, he let the kids hang around and showed them the ropes. He raised traditional heritage breeds like Rhode Island Reds, Barred Rocks, New Hampshires and Black Jersey Giants.

"It was before battery houses came into vogue in the late 1960's, free range egg production was still in existence," said Easterbrook.

Those visits sparked his lifelong passion for poultry and deep interest in the avian world. At only eight years old, Easterbrook and his friend were tending their own flock of free range chickens, providing eggs for their families and neighbours.

Thirty years later, Easterbrook bought eight acres of ALR land in Richmond on the Fraser River. After some market research, he discovered that no one was selling certified organic eggs anywhere in Canada. He approached the British Columbia Association for Regenerative Agriculture (BCARA) to suggest that they work together to establish some regulatory standards. They gave him some California standards to guide him in the meantime.

> A staff of eight tend to 5000 layer hens, producing 4700 eggs a day... Chickens range in a lovely organic pasture and dine on certified organic vegetarian feed.

He built a barn, purchased a small flock of poultry and was off and running. Well sort of – until he hit a pretty big glitch when he contacted the BC Egg Marketing Board (BCEMB) and learned about the quota system.

And so ensued a long and drawn out struggle to help establish the organic egg industry. Other organic egg producers were involved over the years and each played a significant role in the development of the industry. Since the inception of the boards, the markets have changed a lot, especially with the rise of organics, but marketing schemes have not. It would have cost Easterbrook about $70 a bird to buy quota.

In 1994, Easterbrook opened up outside of the system initially with 300 hens and sold his organic eggs to Circling Dawn, an early "health food" store in Vancouver. The customers loved the eggs. After some tweaking of the organic feed with supplier and organic pioneer Rod Reid, production was ramped up and he was off to the races.

Then two BCEMB inspectors showed up on his farm and started counting birds.

The woman said, "I've never seen birds outside before, it's so beautiful and uplifting."

*Laying hens feast on fresh greens.*

The man said, "You have to have quota or we'll shut you down."

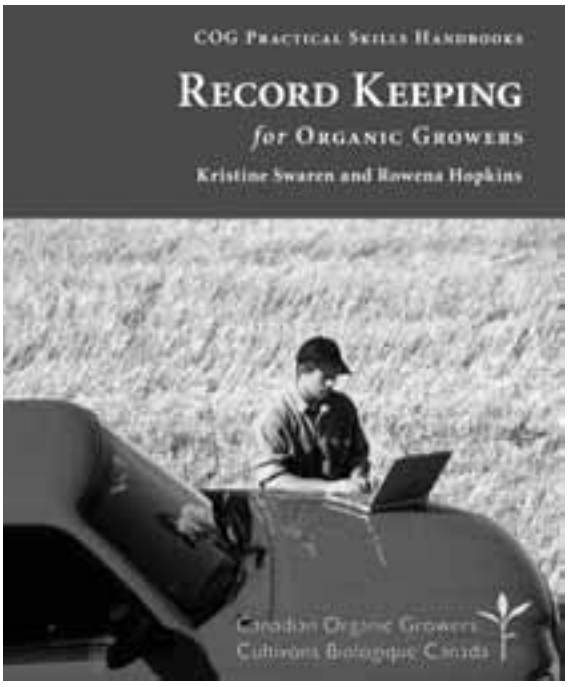
A few days later Easterbrook received a letter informing him he was operating illegally. He couldn't afford a lawyer, but with the help of a law librarian, he managed to file an appeal. He also launched a customer campaign that resulted in a flood of faxes and a petition sent to the BCEMB and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Easterbrook calls it freedom farming. "Livestock are free to maintain their normal social order. They can move, interact, dust, scratch, peck."

*Continued on page 28...*

# Record Keeping for Organic Growers:

## *The new Practical Skills Handbook from Canadian Organic Growers*




By Kristine Swaren, COG

If there is one thing guaranteed to give organic farmers sleepless nights it's paperwork. Yet good record keeping is an essential part of any well managed organic operation.

Roxanne Beavers and Rowena Hopkins have presented "Record Keeping for Streamlined Certification and Farmer Sanity" to packed rooms at the ACORN conference for 3 years. The room is always filled with nervous looking farmers looking for guidance and verification that what they are doing will "pass." Much of the problem lies with farmers assuming that there is a right way to keep records and a fear that what they are doing is wrong.

On the off-chance that more farmers wish to improve on their record keeping, Canadian Organic Growers has published "Record Keeping for Organic Growers." The latest in COG's series of practical skills handbooks, this one explains the what, why and how of organic record keeping, complete with advice from farmers who have long kept excellent records. With examples from field crop and livestock operations, market gardens and on-farm processors, the handbook covers the entire process from annual planning and daily record keeping to inspection day.

> *The main challenge is just taking the time to sit and record what was done – it is important to plan this into your day! You have to write it down today or it won't get written. – Lorne Jamieson, farmer, ON*

The book starts by asking the question "Why Keep Records?", listing the benefits of a good record keeping system both in terms of farm management and organic certification. Chapter 2 explains how organic certification works, while Chapter 3 covers the purpose, structure and content of an Organic Plan.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to setting up an effective record keeping system that works for you, your certifier and the inspector. Key documents, such as the farm journal, field history, maps, composting records, seed search document and inventory records are covered more in-depth.

Traceability is covered in Chapter 5, followed by an overview of the inspection process and the steps that occur after the on-farm inspection. There are also valuable tips from inspectors and certifiers and profiles of farms with established record keeping systems in place.

The following excerpt is an example of the approachable presentation style used throughout the handbook.

**The Farm Journal**

The Farm Journal is the basic operational record for many farms. It is a place where all

# 11 Tips for your Farm Journal

1. Update your Farm Journal regularly, ideally daily, so that you don't forget important details. Treat it as a therapeutic exercise at the end of the day.

2. If you keep notes in a notepad or on a clipboard as you are working, then you can save them all up to be transferred at the end of the day or week. Just don't lose that notepad!

3. Keep your Farm Journal in one location so that you don't have to hunt for it.

4. Make sure that you have a spare blank Farm Journal ready for when you fill it up so that you don't have to write on envelopes or scrap paper for a week.

5. Use a colour coding system (either different coloured pens or highlighters) to draw attention to key information, for instance highlighting crop, livestock or field names– this makes finding information easier.

6. Try to be consistent in your sequencing of information so that it is easy to retrieve. Write either chronologically or group information by theme

7. Organize your journal with, for instance, financial transactions on the left-hand pages and activity details on the right-hand pages.

8. Keep lists, hand-drawn maps and charts together at the end of the journal (or use sticky-notes to flag pages you refer to frequently).

9. Start a new journal each year and write the year prominently on the cover and down the spine. Store all of your old journals in one location.

10. Remember to back up any computerized information *regularly* onto a memory stick, disc, external hard-drive or offsite storage such as 'dropbox.com' so that if your computer dies, your records won't die with it. Add "backup files" to your weekly or monthly to-do list.

11. Keep your records in a format that you enjoy using and you will be more likely to keep them up-to-date.

of the day-to-day activities on your farm can be recorded.

Making daily entries in a Farm Journal is the easiest way to keep up-to-date records about what's happening on the farm. Easiest, because it's in one location and the information can later be used to update specific records and planning documents to prepare for inspection or next year's application.

While many people keep a paper Farm Journal, others find using a computer more practical for legibility as well as retrieving information, cutting and pasting common information, editing and updating. There is no right or wrong way to keep your Farm Journal provided that it works for you on a daily basis and that it is easy to extract information both for your own use and during the inspection process.

If you like technology, want to save time and easily share your information with others (or can't read your own handwriting) having a computerized Farm Journal makes sense.

If you don't like computers, your computer came out of the ark or you like updating your journal in your favorite deck-chair then maybe a paper journal is a better fit.

*Record Keeping for Organic Growers was written by Kristine Swaren and Rowena Hopkins. It is available for purchase from COG for $22 ($19 for COG members) at www.cog.ca or 1-888-375-7393.*

# Closing The Loop
## COABC's 2010 Conference

Over 100 people attended our "Closing the Loop" conference at the Executive Inn in Kamloops. The weekend started off with a lovely opening reception at the restored church St Andrews on the Square. Catered by Conscientious Catering, and our very own Moss Dance providing music, the evening also featured a presentation by Sioux County economic development officer Robert Marqusee via web conferencing. This got the weekend started with discussions about how local organic producers can be an economic driver for local development.

Saturday was capped off by an excellent organic banquet, extensive silent auction and much dancing to the sounds of the local Blue's Jumpers Band.

The second annual VO / CC / CB roundtable was held on Sunday afternoon. It was a resounding success, and we hope to make it a permanent feature at the COABC conference.

This yearly conference is not only about education but is an opportunity to meet and catch up with our friends and colleagues. As one attendee said "Lovely time, my first COABC conference and I will come back." Hopefully we will see you all next year!

*~ Sarah Clark*

# Conference Highlights

By Moss Dance

Saturday morning keynote speaker **Dr Bill Code** highligted the power of an organic diet to address longerm health issues. Dr Code's work links wheat sensitivities (and overconsumption of processed wheat in the North American diet) to a variety of neurological and other longterm illnesses. You can find his work online at www.drbillcode.com.

*Dr. Bill Code*

**David Johnson** offered a webinar on the **Transition Towns** movement from his home in Portland, Oregon. This webinar was highly relevant to us as food producers and I enjoyed thinking about the ways that farmers and producers can participate in an "Energy Descent" society. That is, if we recognize that fossil fuels are now depleting (peak oil theory) we can use this time of energy descent to come together and design the future we want to see. Check out Transition Towns online: www.transitionnetwork.org

**Nick Andrews** presented his amazing **OSU Organic Fertilizer Calculator** created in collaboration with Dan Sullivan. This is a helpful spreadsheet tool that will calculate the amount of availble nutrients you can expect from a variety of cover crops. On top of that, this handy tool will compare the cost and levels of plant-available nutrients to commercial fertilizers (both organic and inorganic). The OSU Organic Fertilizer Calculator for cover crops is not yet available online, but go to this link to request a copy: http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/organic-fertilizer-calculator

*Heather Pritchard*
*Credit: Moss Dance*

**Whole Farm Planning** with **Ramona Scott, Barbara Joughin** and **Heather Pritchard** focused on the Community Farms Movement. Whether you're thinking of purchasing a farm with a group, or farming on land you don't own, the Community Farm Guide can help you plan for sucess. Visit http://blog.conservancy.bc.ca/agriculture/publications/ to download your copy of the guide and adapt it to your unique situation.


*The Conscientious Catering Van*
*Credit: Moss Dance*

**The meals** were nourishing *and* spectacular. Thanks to Conscientious Catering for providing exquisitely ethical local food at the Friday night reception. www.caterkamloops.webs.com

Many thanks to COABC's amazing staff for putting together this event!

# Updates on GE Seeds

## GE alfalfa threatens organics, GE flax contamination hits Canadian farmers & Parliament debates Bill C-474 and the economic impacts of GE for farmers

By Lucy Sharratt

This time last year I wrote an article on the future of Monsanto's GE alfalfa. Well, the future is now.

It's no exaggeration to say that organic food and farming in North America is under immediate threat from genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa. This is the year that we protect or loose alfalfa, and organic farming. Though GE alfalfa is not yet legal to grow in Canada, it could be planted in the US this summer, leading to inevitable contamination across our boarder.

If the US legalizes Monsanto's GE alfalfa this year, Monsanto will likely also try to quickly commercialize in Canada. The Canadian government has actually already approved Monsanto's GE herbicide resistant (Roundup Ready) alfalfa for human and environmental safety but it cannot be commercially grown in Canada yet. Monsanto needs to apply for variety registration before it can legally sell GE alfalfa seed, but this could happen at any time.

The existing safety approval for GE alfalfa in Canada means that if the US plants GE alfalfa and it contaminates Canadian crops and food (as it will), farmers and consumers in Canada will have no legal recourse and we cannot expect any action from our government.

The current fight over alfalfa will set many precedents, for good or ill. In Canada, the current crisis in the flax industry clearly illustrates what GE contamination can mean for farmers.

## Flax Contamination Crisis Reveals the Costs of GE for Farmers

Last year, Canada was the source of major international GE contamination as our exports of flax contained a GE flax that is not approved outside of Canada and the US. Farmers in Canada are paying the price for this GE flax contamination that shut down their export markets. The current flax crisis warns of the consequences for alfalfa growers and processors if GE alfalfa is planted.

GE flax was approved for safety in Canada, but ten years ago flax farmers convinced the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to remove variety registration, making it illegal to sell the GE seeds. Flax growers took this measure to protect their European markets (around 60% of Canada's flax exports go to Europe).

This measure unfortunately failed to stop contamination and the economic harm is just as the flax farmers had predicted. Canada was a world leader in the production and export of flax.

As well as driving home the reality of contamination and the economic harm this can bring, the flax crisis revealed the corporate agenda to stop farmers from saving their seeds. Grain company Viterra, and others wanted to force farmers who wished to grow flax this year for Europe, to abandon their farm-saved seed and purchase certified seed instead. The industry failed in this attempt after certified seed samples from five flax varieties tested positive for GE contamination!

Organic and conventional farmers agree that they don't need or want Monsanto's GE Roundup Ready alfalfa. GE contamination would be an economic and environmental disaster that would affect livestock producers and dairy farmers, honey producers and alfalfa sprout and seed producers.

Arnold Taylor, president of the Canadian Organic Growers and organic alfalfa and flax grower says that this perennial is irreplaceable because of its many unique benefits, including its role in building the soil.

A major concern with GE alfalfa is the future of organic livestock and dairy production in North America as the demand for organic feed already outstrips demand.

## GE Alfalfa this Year?

The US is now preparing their final decision to permit GE alfalfa but Monsanto might force this outcome first. On April 27 Monsanto's arguments challenging a current court injunction on planting GE alfalfa will be heard in the US Supreme Court.

In 2007, a judge ruled that the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) approval of GE alfalfa was illegal because the Department did not conduct a full assessment of farmer concerns about contamination. The court then ordered an injunction on planting until the USDA produced an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In late December 2009, the USDA released its draft EIS on GM alfalfa for public comment (this is the first time it has conducted this type of analysis for any GM crop).

The USDA's draft EIS recognizes that contamination will happen but incorrectly argues that it can be minimized. It also states that organic consumers will accept GE contamination. The USDA agrees that GE alfalfa will result in fewer small farms and fewer organic farms but concludes that this doesn't matter! (See comments to the USDA from Canadian groups at www.cban.ca/alfalfa )

## What can we do in Canada?

In March, Parliament debated Bill C-474, a Bill to require an assessment of potential export market harm before new GE seeds are sold in Canada. This measure would have saved Canada's flax farmers and could stop GE alfalfa and GE wheat. This is the first time that our MPs are debating


the economic cost of GE and the reality of contamination. The Bill debate is a major success that points out the harmful reality of GE that can no longer be ignored. (Updates on the next steps to support Bill C-474 can be found at www.cban.ca/474 )

Even if we can push Bill C-474 into legislation however, it will likely come too late to save alfalfa. This is why, as the US courts battle over GE alfalfa, we need to stop GE alfalfa here in Canada.

For action details and updates check www.cban.ca/alfalfa and ww.cban.ca/Take-Action contact Lucy Sharratt at CBAN 613 241 2267 ext.6 coordinator@cban.ca

*Lucy Sharratt is the Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network.*

# Fresh Voices 2010

*For the third year in a row, COABC has organized the Fresh Voices contest to bring new ideas and energy into the organic sector. One aim of the contest is to involve and reward farmers who are in the beginning stages of their farming careers. A second aim is to disseminate the findings widely in order to share information and stimulate discussion across the sector. Ultimately, we want to gather practical "how to" ideas that farmers can use on their farms. We hope to hold the contest again next year, so be looking for the contest details in the winter issue of the Grower.*

*This year's contest was the toughest yet. Perhaps too tough! I'd like to thank both, Niki and Mélanie, for their well-written and interesting entries into our contest. They were the only two entrants, and after reading their submissions we came to the conclusion that our question was inappropriate for fresh voices. It asked for knowledge that was beyond the realm of the new farmer. However, we liked what they had to say so we offered them both a $100 honorarium for their effort. COABC has yet to decide what we will do with the remaining $800 prize money from Sea Soil, but we are likely to allot it to learning resources for our farmers.*

*Thanks again to our entrants and our sponsor, Sea Soil, for a great learning and sharing opportunity.*

*~ Robin Tunnicliffe*

*Mélanie Sylvestre harvesting strawberries.*
*Credit: Robin Tunnicliffe*

# Patient farmers make happy worms!

By Mélanie Sylvestre

For centuries, farmers around the world have been fertilizing their land with manure, compost, plants and using other natural practices. Phrases, such as "feed the soil and the soil will feed the plants," are part of the daily thoughts of organic farmers. Farm fertility is a science but it is also important to think about it as a practice, a commitment and a vision. Certified organic practices, long term knowledge of the soil, financial stability and community are just some of many aspects that can be included in a portrait of farm fertility.

Practices to increase and maintain good fertility include: crop rotation, the use of cover crops, and the application of differ-

*continued on the bottom of page 27...*

# The Future of Soil Fertility

By Niki Strutynski


Niki Strutynski (left) and Ulli Weidenhammer-Courtemanche (right).
Credit: Lori Weidenhammer

Academic papers abound on the subject of soil fertility and its relation to land tenure in developing countries, particularly in Africa. In general, their conclusions can be distilled as follows: land ownership or secure long-term tenure/lease agreements encourage farmers to invest in improving soil fertility; whereas farmers who do not own land, or have secure land tenure agreements, lack incentive to conserve and build the soil.

For example, one study in Niger shows that farmers are more likely to apply manure to fields with secure tenure (through ownership or long-term lease) than to fields with short-term leases. This is because the application of manure involves great effort, both in terms of cost and labour - the benefits of which will not show until the following season. If there is no guarantee that the farmer will have access to the same land in that next season, then there is no incentive to conserve or build the soil. Rather, insecure land tenure encourages a "take what you can get, when you can get it" attitude that leads to further soil degradation.[1]

In Niger, as well as other African nations, there is no shortage of traditional knowledge, nor lack of agencies to teach farmers how to improve soil fertility. What farmers lack are incentives. To address this, num-

erous studies recommend both formal and informal changes to improve land tenure security. However, these changes are not easily implemented. The barriers to change are often social and cultural, including perceptions of land ownership and the role of farmers in society. Therefore, change must occur at the policy level as well as within society and communities.

Likewise, here in BC the barriers to improving soil fertility are not due to a lack of knowledge. Information and theory about techniques for conserving and building soil fertility are readily available in books, on the internet, and from fellow farmers. Like in Africa, the barriers are social and cultural. Addressing the challenge of conserving soil fertility is not about simply farming "right," it is about ensuring the "right" farmers have secure access to land.

Currently in BC there is much discussion about new farmers and their need to access land, but rarely does this discussion include the topic of soil fertility. I propose that one of the most important actions we can take toward conserving and building soil fertility here in BC, just as in Africa, is to enhance access to land with secure long-term tenures or through outright ownership, particularly for young farmers.

Young farmers tend to be educated, with an understanding of ecological farm practices. They also tend to be idealistic and motivated, wanting to do the "right" thing. But like their fellow African farmers, they are having difficulty accessing land. On short-term leased land they lack the security of knowing that the investments they make today — in the form of building compost, cover cropping, conservation ploughing, rotating crops and managing nutrients — will be of benefit to them in the future. If we want to invest in long-term soil fertility, then we need to invest in young farmers who will be on the land long-term. Young farmers are the future of soil fertility.

Some ways in which we can improve access and secure land tenure for young farmers include, but by no means are limited to, the following.

**Education and incentives for non-farmer land owners.**
Why is it that economic output is the only consideration when assessing land for farm tax credit? Green economics and environmental accounting are being applied to other sectors, why not include them in agriculture? If conservation practices and building soil fertility were criteria for farm status, then landowners would have more incentive to lease to a diversity of organic farmers, rather than simply leasing their land out for hay or conventional monocrops.

**Support young farmers with training.**
Currently there is a gap between agricultural training programs and the next step of starting a farm. We need to recognize our young farmers who have training and experience in ecological farm practices and help them access land. For example, "incubator farm" programs that provide land for business start-up, grants that reward ecological practice, and financing tailored for young farmers (including those working small-scale farms and leased land).

**Review of ALR in regard to subdividing farms for small-scale operations.**
Where land prices are prohibitive to the individual young farmer, a group of farmers might be able to afford land. However, the ALR makes it difficult for a group of farmers to subdivide into smaller farm parcels (or to live separately on one large farm). Why not allow ALR subdivisions in cases where a group of farmers will establish many farm businesses where there once was just one (or none)? Make ecological farm practices another criteria for subdivision and we might find BC's farmland more productive than ever.

**Reconsider farming on public parkland.**
Agriculture is a public amenity. Parkland encourages public health through outdoor recreation. Why not also encourage health by producing healthy food in our parks? Certain parks are an ideal place to demonstrate sustainable agriculture, educate the public about farming, and actually grow food in the very hearts of our communities.

**Land purchase programs from retiring farmers.**
Why is it that (where I live at least) only wealthy summer tourists from Alberta can

afford to buy available farmland? They have no intention of farming, but only desire to build large summer homes on acreage. We cannot blame farmers for selling when their retirement depends on it, but why not institute programs that purchase the land interim so new farmers can then lease-to-own gradually?

These are but a few ideas for ways to connect young farmers with secure, long-term access to land. We must acknowledge how important this is for the future of soil fertility. We must take to heart that soil fertility does not begin with what we put on the land, but begins with who we put on the land. Young farmers are the future of soil fertility and we must ensure that they have the proper support and access to land, so that they can be stewards of the soil for years to come.

*Niki Strutynski is a young farmer currently living and working in Peachland, BC. She hasdegrees in Global Resource Systems and Landscape Architecture. She has also worked on various farms in BC, Ontario, Thailand and Ecuador. One day, she hopes to have her own farm.*

[1] Neef, Andreas. Land Tenure and Soil Conservation Practices: Evidence from West Africa and Southeast Asia, Sustaining the Global Farm: Selected Papers from the 10th International Soil Conservation Organization Meeting. P. 125-130, 2001.

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....Happy Worms, continued from page 24

ent forms of compost. These practices are essential to organic farming as they help to create and sustain soil fertility. In reality, these practices can be challenging and farmers are struggling. The availability of natural resources for use as compost can be sparse in some regions; unpredictable weather can make cover crop planning a challenge; and financial needs push many farmers to sacrifice their best crop rotation. With these realities, farmers have to rely on other sources of fertility. Minerals and liquid fertilizer are excellent additions to a fertility plan and diversifying resources is a good practice.

It takes time to get to know the soil of a specific farm and with time, it becomes easier to have a good fertility plan. Knowing the soil requires observation and commitment. Taking note of every relevant detail about the land is an excellent practice. Every farmer should keep a record of their soil structure, the native plants growing in different areas, the growing section which seems to be poor, etc. In the long term, those notes will become the most precious reference. Doing regular soil testing and keeping all the records as a reference is also a good practice. Nature has her way of doing things and humans are often not adapted to it. The best tool for increasing fertility is patience.

Financial stress is the worst enemy of soil fertility. For new farmers out there, many decisions in the first couple years are heart breaking. Sometimes the land and the farmer are under stress to produce enough. Sustaining yourself financially through the first few years is a big challenge. One way to look at how to get around those first difficult years without compromising your farm fertility is to diversify your income. Working part time on the farm and part time off the farm can help remove some financial stress, allowing you to plant more beneficial crops that won't require as much care (alfalfa, clover). Creating farm tours for schools or workshops on the farm can also be another source of income that won't stress the land. There are many ideas out there to help out farmers make the right decision. The secret is staying committed, thinking ahead, planning realistically and never sacrificing fertility for short term needs.

On a practical level, fertility is about knowledge, planning, commitment and patience. Perhaps we need to look at fertility in terms of human activity on the farm? Not the human reproduction potential but the potential of the farm to create new farmers through apprenticeships, sharing knowledge and inspiration. A farm that focuses on building community and inspiring new farmers to start growing food should be viewed as a success and a sign of good fertility too! The success of a farm is too often measured in terms of dollars and pounds. Many farms out there have been inspiring generations of new farmers. Human fertility on the farm

is as important as the potential of a farm to produce food.

Farmers are the stewards and caretakers of the land as well as the farm community; their success can be gauged by both human and soil fertility. Diversification will enhance all aspects of organic farming. By remembering to plan ahead, having patience and staying-committed to the essentials of fertility, the farmer will surely get to appreciate years of sustainable healthy farming and make many earthworms happy!

*Mélanie Sylvestre has been involved in organic agriculture for seven years and has been farming on the Saanich Peninsula for the past four. This year she will be returning to school in Applied Biology in order to get closer to her dream of having a parcel of land to call home.*

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*...Rabbit River Farms, continued from page 17*

*Mother hen with chicks*
*Credit: Steve Easterbrook*

Easterbrook took an educational approach during his appeal. He delivered a presentation on the health and environmental benefits of organic eggs. He encouraged them to see this as a market opportunity.

"Trying to shut organics down was contrary to their purpose as an egg marketing board," he said.

They agreed not to shut him down, if he agreed not to expand. But ultimately, he had to bite the bullet and become part of the supply management system. Conflicts in the industry continued between the BCEMB and other organic producers that eventually elevated to legal battles. Easterbrook just kept his head down and worked continuously, lobbying for a "New Entrant" status and program.

This winter, things finally shifted and Easterbrook could celebrate. The BCEMB is finally implementing a recommendation from a study commissioned in 2006 by the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture. Four new organic egg producers with 3,000 birds a piece will be grandfathered in to the system each year in a lottery.

Today, Rabbit River Farms is certified by the Fraser Valley Organic Producers Association. A staff of eight tend to 5000 layer hens, producing 4700 eggs a day that are then sold in stores throughout BC. Chickens range in a lovely organic pasture and dine on certified organic vegetarian feed.

They also grade eggs from 7 other certified specialty egg farms. In addition to certified organic free range eggs, they also offer regular free range, free run and free run Omega 3 eggs. Each of the cage free egg types has different feed, and management standards, but all of the hens are cage free and certified by an independent third party FVOPA/SPCA. The eggs sell in over 80 BC stores.

"Livestock are free to maintain their normal social order. They can move, interact, dust, scratch, peck," he said. He calls it "freedom farming."

Easterbrook's new state of the art "translucent" barn is in full operation now too. It has an egg grading station and a three level open nesting system with manure collection belts, which gets composted in an Earth Bin. Birds live comfortably in a naturally, daylighted environment. Easterbrook has applied for farm gate status and hopes to soon be selling eggs, heritage poultry breeds, and a chicken manure based fertilizer and soil mix on site. The organic egg business is hopping along nicely now. And so to the catchy name – Rabit River Farms.

"It's a play on my last name," says Easterbrook. And the farm is on, well, not a brook, but a rather mighty river. www.rabbitriverfarms.com

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

...Bindweed Survey Results, continued from page 13

have minimized their losses by avoiding the areas that are the most impacted.

## Hope on the Horizon

Despite the clear and direct impact field bindweed is having on a portion of organic producers in BC unfortunately the results of this survey are too slim to have an impact on how field bindweed is categorized by the various ministries in BC. For now Convolvulus arvensis will remain listed as an invasive plant by the BC Ministry of Forest and Range's Biocontrol Program, as a prohibited noxious weed under the Canada Seeds Act, and as a nuisance weed in certain regions by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

Amazingly there is some hope on the horizon. Karen Bailey, an AAFC Research Scientist in Saskatoon has been working on the development of a bioherbicide derived from Phoma macrostoma — a fungus. She has found Phoma able to set back broadleaved weeds like dandelion, Canada thistle, and even field bindweed (unbelievable) as the infection turns the plant tissue white making it impossible for the plant to photosynthesis. Repetitive applications are needed for persistent monsters like thistle and bindweed but Karen believes Phoma will prevail. The product is at least two years away from commercial licensing for use in turf systems and agricultural use registrations to follow.

In closing, I'd like to thank all survey participants for their input! There may not be much good news yet, but there is hope, and there is also always the field bindweed support group!

*Rochelle Eisen is COABC's Organic Extension Agent.*

## 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.**

### Field Bindweed Sufferers Society (FBSS)

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

# Events and Announcements

## COABC Achievements

*By Sarah Clark*

- √ 2010 COABC Conference "Closing the Loop" held in Kamloops March 2010.
- √ Secured $900,000 for new Organic Sector Development Fund to implement the BC Organic Sector Strategic Plan. Funding for the OSDP comes from "The Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program" (CAAP) and is administered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation.
- √ COABC President Brad Reid met with Minister of Agriculture Steve Thomson.
- √ Held webinars on bees and on livestock in February.
- √ Updated Cyber help website. Added new "Bee" page and also updated on-farm food safety, certification, animal welfare, compost and composting pages.
- √ Accreditation: COABC passed the required CFIA audit. Working with CB administrators to streamline accreditation processes.

## Achieving success through involvement!

At the 2009 COABC Board Retreat the following committees were identified to help move the organization forward. Which one speaks to you? Where do your skills fit in?

**The Capacity Development Committee:** The Capacity Development Committee will be responsible for finding and securing funding sources to ensure the sustainability of COABC.

**The new BCCOP Campaign Committee:** The BCCOP Campaign Committee will primarily be responsible for implementing BCCOP branding strategies and acquiring the funding to support these specific initiatives.

**The Advocacy Committee**: The Advocacy Committee can be convened to deal with issues such as regulating the term Organic in BC. This would include preparations for meetings with Ministers and government officials.

Interested in helping out? Contact COABC administrator Sarah Clark at admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

**The CFIA and the Canada Organic Office** are pleased to announce that the CGSB Organic Standards are now available on the CGSB website free of charge. English: http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html

**The public review period** for the latest amendments proposed for the Canada Organic Standards (CAN/CGSB 32.310 & CAN/CGSB 32.311) is now open as the revisions are officially posted at http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/prgsrv/stdsdev/nsa/pubrevdoc/pubrevdoc-e.html

**Congratulations to Gay Hahn** dairy producer, industry leader, educator and volunteer from Burnaby, BC, is one of 5 Canadian women to win the FCC Rosemary Davis Award for her leadership and commitment to the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry.

**BC FARM Knowledge Network** has been launched as an online discussion and networking resource for BC farmers and others interested in BC agriculture. It is a way for the many small farm groups, Farmer's Institutes, Agricultural Societies and especially individuals who identify with the term "community agriculture" to meet and to share ideas and to market products online. Dennis Lapierre the Community Agriculture Director representing both the FARM Community Council and the COABC on the BCAC board is the creator as well as Network administrator. Be sure to check it out. http://forums.bcac.bc.ca/forum.php

## 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): | | |

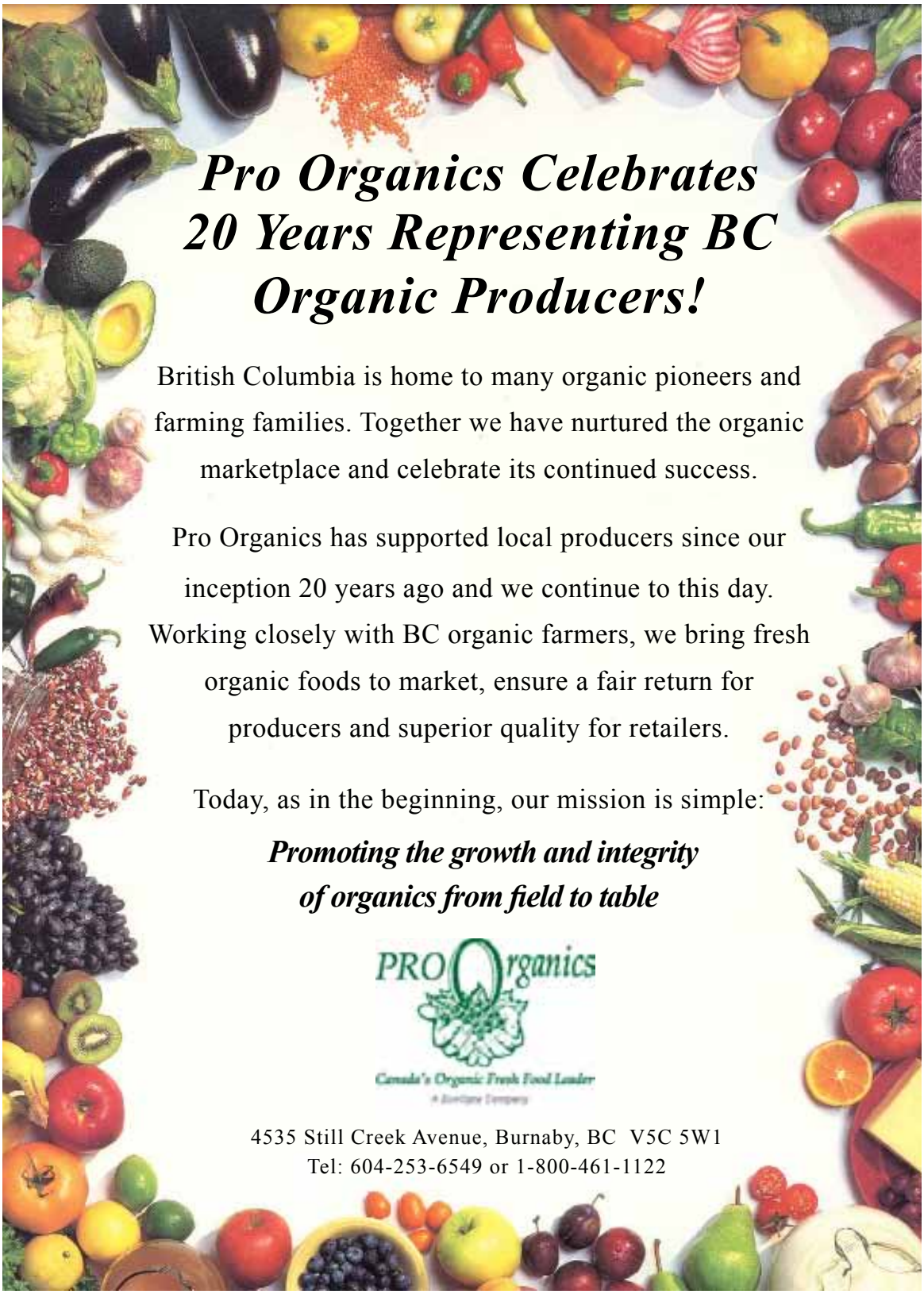
*Limited quantities available - please contact the COABC office for availability GST # 887782431 RT 0001

**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.

TO ORDER ONLINE VISIT:
**WWW.CERTIFIEDORGANIC.BC.CA**



# *Pro Organics Celebrates 20 Years Representing BC Organic Producers!*

British Columbia is home to many organic pioneers and farming families. Together we have nurtured the organic marketplace and celebrate its continued success.

Pro Organics has supported local producers since our inception 20 years ago and we continue to this day. Working closely with BC organic farmers, we bring fresh organic foods to market, ensure a fair return for producers and superior quality for retailers.

Today, as in the beginning, our mission is simple:

***Promoting the growth and integrity of organics from field to table***

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*Canada's Organic Fresh Food Leader*

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