

British Columbia

Organic Grower

In this issue:

Twin Meadows Organics

Saturday farmers

Is social media worth it?

UBC's cover crop research

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In This Issue

| | |
|---|----|
| President's Letter | 3 |
| Administrator's Report | 4 |
| Editor's Note | 5 |
| Footnotes from the Field | 12 |
| Farmer Focus: Twin Meadows Organics | 16 |
| Events and Announcements | 30 |
| COABC Order Form | 31 |



Off the grid at Twin Meadows Organics. Regular columnist Spring Gillard is inspired by grains and baby carrots on page 16.



Is peat moss sustainable? Marjorie Harris explores the carbon footprint of this favourite potting medium on page 12.

BC Organic Grower

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On the Cover: Risa Lin, Formosa Nursery Credit: Spring Gillard

Layout & Design: moss dance

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Features

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Saturday Farmers | 6 |
| Community Farms Part IV | 10 |
| Social Media on the Farm | 14 |
| 10 Fall Market Tips for Farmers | 19 |
| EcoReality Herd Share | 21 |
| UBC Cover Crops Research | 24 |
| Richmond's Dirty Little Secret | 28 |



Blogging, posting and tweeting can really create a buzz about your farm. Learn more with Rob-in Tunncliffe on page 14.

President's Letter

Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights. ~Pauline R. Kezer~

Autumn begins this month and what a summer we have had. For many of us it started as a tough growing season but the weather has changed and now the harvest is good!



The COABC has great roots. In 1993 a number of regional organic certification bodies established the COABC in order to have a credible accreditation and certification program in the province. Over the past eighteen years we have seen many changes. Some of our founding associations chose to join together and PACS was formed. Accreditation under the BC Certified Organic ISO 65 Compliant Program entitles BCARA, FVOPA and PACS to supply its operators with certification under the Canada Organic Regime.

Our roots have become stronger as our branches are always being pruned. As new branches grew we have stretched and COABC has reached new heights. We are leaders in organic agriculture in Canada and in the world.

I am excited to be a BC Farmer – a BC organic farmer – and even more excited to be a BC certified organic farmer.

This past month COABC had the privilege of meeting twice with Don McRae our BC Minister of Agriculture. Kris Chand and Carmen Wakeling met with the minister at Eatmore Sprouts and then within 2 weeks Anne Macey and myself were invited to meet with him in his Victoria office. He listened to us and I believe he heard that the COABC is a leader. He heard that we want to work with government and all those in agriculture in BC to keep BC in a leadership position in the agriculture sector.

It has been a tough year for COABC producers. The stream of commerce ended at the end of June. On July 1, the National Organic Standard became the required standard for Canadian organic prod-

ucts. In BC we are challenged. If we are certified by PACS, FVOPA or BCARA we can no longer label our products as certified organic. The other certifying bodies are able to refer to products as certified organic but the big question is: How do we market our products beside the organic products sold by non-certified producers?

This is where the checkmark comes in. COABC directors have been talking to government about the best way to address the “organic vs certified organic” problem. What is the right answer? What can we do? What can you do?

For fifteen years we have been training consumers to look for the words “Certified Organic” – that option has now been taken away. But the COABC is in a good position. Our checkmark logo includes the phrase “British Columbia Certified Organic,” which we are still able to use. I encourage all BC producers to use this logo in your marketing by “checking” your product.

October 15 to 22 is National Organic Week. We will meet with the Minister again during this week. With our deep roots we are spreading our branches. We are reaching out to the Minister of Agriculture and including him in our plans. We are inviting him to include COABC in agriculture plans for the province so that all BC agriculture can benefit. We want to show the world that our province is a leader in innovation with rooted farmers who are growing and working together to supply BC consumers with BC grown food and other agriculture products. 🌱

Mary Forstbauer
COABC President & BioD rep

left coast
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Administrator's Report by Jen Gamble

As the growing season is winding down, National Organic Week gives the organic sector a reason to celebrate the harvest and share our success.



National Organic Week runs October 15-22, 2011. This is a great opportunity to talk to friends, neighbours and customers about organics. As members of the organic sector, we should be proud of the positive effects our industry has on the environment. It is worth reminding everyone that certified organic food means cleaner air, safer drinking water and healthier food chains, here in BC and around the world.

Spark conversation during Organic Week by displaying COABC promotional material where you sell your certified organic products. Contact the office to request materials and check out www.organicweek.ca for a listing of events in BC and around the country.

"Innovations" will be the theme of the 2012 COABC conference. Our planning team has been meeting to start shaping the 2012 conference. The team is currently identifying and booking speakers, and suggestions are welcome. The Conference will be held in Chilliwack at the Rainbow Country Inn from February 24-26, 2012. We hope to make it an innovative experience. Watch for information on the COABC facebook and twitter accounts. 

Achievements for last Quarter

- Met twice with Minister of Agriculture, Don McRae
- Hired 2012 conference co-ordination team and finalized conference theme
- Finalized 2nd Quarter financials
- Promoted National Organic week



Look for us online!

You can find COABC on Twitter (@coabccanada) and on facebook - search "Certified Organic Associations of BC". Find the links on our COABC homepage at:

www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

INNOVATIONS



The 2012 COABC Conference

Feb 24-26, 2012
Chilliwack, BC

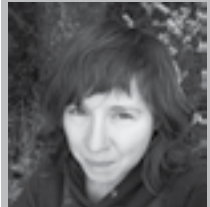
Editor's Note by Andrea Langlois

Although it's very cliché, I can't help but comment on the weather as fall rolls in – it has been so gorgeous that I can just imagine happy squashes ripening in the fields waiting to be in the soups of many this winter.



Andrea Langlois,
editor

And like harvest season, this issue is full of great variety – we get to meet the growers from Twin Meadows Organics, the Growing Opportunities Cooperative, and others. I can't think of any better way to gear up for National Organic Week in October than getting a sense of the faces behind organics in British Columbia.



moss dance, layout

This issue also highlights problem solving and innovation. Jan Steinman writes about the new twist on Community Supported Agriculture and herd sharing as a way to bring raw milk to consumers.

And before you get your cover crops in, we also have research from UBC farms about the nitrogen-fixing properties of various cover crops - hot off the press!

On the marketing side of things Robin Tunnicliffe, from Saanich Organics, gives her account of what it has been like to jump head first into the world of social media, blogging and tweeting from her farm. And Dana Zaruba joins us again to offer her tips as an expert on making the most out of selling at farmers and craft markets.

In Footnotes from the Field, Marjorie Harris brings some interesting, yet troubling information about our world's peatlands. With 20% of the world's carbon sequestered in these lands, she asks the question as to how sustainable it is to use peat and provides readers

with the information you need to make the decision for yourself.

Thanks to all the amazing writers who continue to grace the pages of the BC Organic Grower – this is your publication and your stories and ideas from across the province and beyond make the BCOG what it is. If you have great ideas or a great story, send us your thoughts!

editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Thanks also to all the photographers who caught their special farm moments in pixels and responded to our call-out for photos on the COABC listserv. Any time you feel inspired to share your snapshots with the BCOG, you can email them to Moss at:

bcogadvertising@certifiedorganic.bc.ca



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Saturday Farmers

Take Learning into their Own Hands

Saturday Farmer (*noun*): Beginner urban gardeners who volunteer their labour on a small scale organic farm on Saturdays in exchange for interactive gardening workshops and hands-on learning. Saturday Farmers come to the farm seeking knowledge about backyard food production and a desire to get their hands dirty. They enjoy being able to ask questions during the workshop and see real examples in the field.



Planting arugula in the greenhouse in early spring can help to extend the growing season. Credit Carly Ryan



Saturday Farmer Robyn planting parsnip seeds. Credit: Jill Dalton

By Jill Dalton

During the first Saturday Farmer workshop, I demonstrated how to start seedlings in trays, how to take care of your seedlings, and how to transplant. Afterward, I had a sinking feeling that everyone had been bored, so I asked the group whether that was too basic to start out with.

“No way!” was the collective response. “I had no idea you had to thin out some of your seedlings,” said one participant. “I think I’ve been overwatering,” said someone else.

For the afternoon “work party,” we transplanted melons. It was time to put participants to the test. I asked the group what they were going to do if they came across a pot with two melon seedlings while they were transplanting. Someone hesitantly suggested that maybe they could be separated. No.... Someone else’s eyes lit up. “They’re in the cucumber family right? And you said this morning that those don’t like their roots disturbed. So, I guess we should only plant one and pinch off the other.” Right answer!

The Saturday Farmer program started up in late May at Northbrook Farm, a vegetable and berry farm on Vancouver Island. Nine participants signed up for four consecutive Saturdays. Each day began with a two-hour workshop on topics such as crop planning and rotations, how to start awesome seedlings, soil fertility, cover crops, perennials, and taking care of chickens.

There was one hour for lunch and discussion following the workshop, followed by a three-hour work party in the afternoon. In the field, the conversation bounced around from food politics to codling moths on apple trees and back again. At the end of the program, everyone said that the work in the field complimented what was learned in the morning workshop.

From the farm’s perspective, the timing was great because a lot of work needs to happen all at the same time in May and June. We were able to stay on top of the spring planting and weeding better than ever.

The idea for Saturday Farmer came from the SOIL apprenticeship program (www.soilapprenticeships.org).

As a farm apprentice, I attended monthly workshops with the same format as Saturday Farmer. I remember weeding an entire orchard in one hour with a group of twelve other apprentices at Terra Nossa Farm. The feeling when we finished was so great – especially when I realized that it would have taken more than 12 hours for me to finish such a task on my own. I decided that I wanted to adapt this model for a program that would bring new urban gardeners to the farm to learn about food production with a similar, hands-on approach.

We first promoted Saturday Farmer at Seedy Saturday in Victoria, handing out fliers and generating a buzz. After that, we sent emails out to all of our contacts and promoted it using social media networks. A lot of the responses were from students at the University of Victoria who had heard about it through word of mouth or by email. There was some range of ages of participants, but most were in their 20s or early 30s. Many of the participants were pretty new to gardening, but some were more experienced.

There was no cost to attend the Saturday Farmer program. The only requirements were for participants to fill out an application so we could confirm that they understood the type and amount of work that would be required of them. The application was a simple but effective strategy. Everyone worked hard, and we were continuously impressed at how much the Saturday Farmers accomplished in such a short amount of time.

One of the Saturday Farmers said, and I agree, that the more that folks in the city experience what it's like to produce organic food and begin to understand the challenges and successes of our local farmers, the bet-

ter. An important lesson indeed – and learnt in just a few Saturdays on the farm. 🌱

Jill Dalton is a farmer with Saanich Organics at Northbrook Farm.



Growing Degree Days

Growing degree days (GDD) is a weather-based indicator for assessing crop development. It is a calculation used by crop producers that is a measure of heat accumulation used to predict plant and pest development rates such as the date that a crop reaches maturity.

GDD units can be used to: assess the suitability of a region for production of a particular crop; estimate the growth-stages of crops, weeds or even life stages of insects; predict maturity and cutting dates of forage crops; predict best timing of fertilizer or pesticide application; estimate the heat stress on crops; plan spacing of planting dates to produce separate harvest dates.

Farmwest has developed an online Growing Degree Days calculator where you can customize your growing degree days:

🌐 www.farmwest.com



*Saturday Farmers get the tour of Northbrook Farm.
Credit: John Mardlin*



National Organic Week

October 15-22, 2011

Right: Runner ducks at the Gaia College Farm in Cowichan Station, B.C. Credit: Sonja Callaghan





Above: A simple, low-cost, PVC hoop house can make a huge difference to a small farmer who's just starting out! The high and low tunnel hoop houses in the background cost approximately \$500 (for both) and were set up on a Saturday afternoon with a crew of helpful friends and family at Ripple Farm in Merville, BC. Credit: moss dance

Opposite: Carol Wagner dries off a strapping 3.7 kilogram newborn buckling at EcoReality Cooperative Ecovillage on Saltspring Island. EcoReality members share in, amongst other things, a dairy herd share (see p. 21 "Got Raw Milk?") Credit: Jan Steinman

Busy Carol also helps to bring in the winter squash harvest at EcoReality.

Find out more!

Learn more about National Organic Week, including events across Canada at:

 www.organicweek.ca/events.php

Growing Opportunities Cooperative



Credit: Craig Evans



By Heather Pritchard

Throughout British Columbia over 20 farms call themselves “Community Farms” – multi-functional farms where the land is held “in trust” for community use rather than privately owned and where more than one farming enterprise shares the land. Some have been around for decades while others, like Growing Opportunities, are in the early stages of development.

During the process of defining their purpose, Growing Opportunities participants found themselves divided into two groups: those committed to increas-

ing food security in their region and those wanting to focus on farming. A lively debate resulted in the decision to form two coops.

The first is the Growing Opportunities Service Coop, whose members are committed to securing farmland, fundraising for infrastructure and engaging the community in farm-based events and celebrations. Most members don’t see themselves farming but do see the importance of increasing food production in the mid-Vancouver Island region and want to ensure that farmers have access to affordable land. They are open to new members, either individuals or organizations who share their commitment to regional food security.

The second is Growing Opportunities Worker Coop – a coop for people who want to farm. Located on almost two-acres leased from Providence Farm in the Cowichan Valley, Growing Opportunities provides a cooperative farming experience for a diverse group of people wanting to learn how to grow their own food. This coop is open to people of all abilities and experiences who commit to growing food. Some of them, already part of the Providence Farm community, will become members of their own cooperative business.

All the crops are raised organically, though they are not certified yet. Most of the varieties are heirloom breeds. There is a focus on diversity, with plants ranging from familiar garden items like tomatoes, carrots and broccoli to the less common eggplant, peppers, ground cherries, and tomatillos.

Growing Opportunities also keeps bees to help ensure the pollination requirements for the gardens are met. A percentage of the rented land is fallowed in clovers and other bee favourites to ensure happy bees.

**Part 4 of a 4
part series on
Community
Farms**

Some folks are members of both coops. For example, Craig Evans is a grower with 25 years experience in Community and Therapeutic agriculture, and Jen Cody is the past chair of the BC Food Systems Network and a Registered Dietitian, with a Masters of Community Health Science and Nutrition. Jen and Craig also sit on the Community Farms Council, a committee of FarmFolkCityFolk that helps direct the Community Farms Program.

Now in their third growing season, Jen likens the changes and the differences in each new “crop” of participants to the changes every farm experiences as weather and conditions vary from one year to another. New resources become available because different people participate at the farm.

Cindy and John Milne, the Maple Grove folks, have farmed with the coop for two years now. Working at the Providence site during the first year gave them enough experience and confidence to lease a farm business and live at another farm site, with 3 other Growing Opportunities members. All five of the members from Maple Grove actively participate in Growing Opportunities, helping to formalize their structure into a cooperative.

Growing Opportunities operates year-round, with a particular focus on growing food that will go through the winter. “We plant in June to harvest next February, March, and April,” says Jen Cody. Jen particularly loves growing rainbow carrots, which she is currently growing out for seed.

Like other community farms, Growing Opportunities is a gathering place for people to come together to learn, to grow and to celebrate. “In the end, if you want to keep agricultural land agricultural, you can’t just leave it not producing,” says Craig Evans. “You need to get new growers and systems in place.” 🌱

For more information on Growing Opportunities contact them at: growingopportunities@gmail.com. If you are interested in Community Farms check out FarmFolkCityFolk’s projects:

🌐 www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca

Heather Pritchard is the Farm Program Manager of FarmFolkCityFolk Society, a member of Fraser Common Farm Cooperative, a founder of Glorious Organics Cooperative and sits on the Metro Vancouver Agricultural Advisory Committee.



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Sphagnum Moss vs. Peat

Is There Sustainability in our Carbon Sink?



By Marjorie Harris

In this time of concern over climate change and carbon credits where does peat mining fit in? What is peat anyway? Both are important, albeit complicated, questions.

Peat mining has caused significant controversy within the organic industry because peat products come from delicate ecosystems that are considered “non-renewable” resources. However, the peat industry has been drafting a certification process that establishes guidelines and procedures to retain the viability of the peat ecosystem and that will return the ecosystem to a growing state within seven to ten years after mining.

Considering that 10,000 years of peat bog growth is harvested within a few short years its non-renewable resource status remains a controversy. As well, Canada’s peatlands and peat-like organic permafrost soils act as a carbon sink for nearly 20% of the world’s carbon seques-

tered in soil. Considering this, is peat mining really a sustainable industry?

The first bit of housekeeping to do is to know the difference between sphagnum moss and peat. There are a few hundred species of sphagnum mosses that grow on the surfaces of the wetland-bog environments where peat comes from. The sphagnum mosses are living mosses that are carefully harvested by hand methods so as not to damage the living bog environment. The harvested mosses are destined for horticultural uses, such as in hanging baskets and potting mixes.

Peatlands cover 14% of Canada and 16% of Alberta, representing 25% of the world’s peat reserves.¹ Peatlands are most significantly located in the cold, wet, swampy regions of the Northern Hemisphere in Canada, Alaska, Finland, Scotland, Ireland, Russia and Iceland.² Smaller peatland reserves exist in the southern hemisphere, located in Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Tasmania.

Peat refers to the decomposing plant material of the wetland, fen or bog and is made up of many different types of wetland plant residues. Wetlands, fens, bogs and mires have hydric soils (waterlogged) and require specialized plants to colonize them called hydrophytic vegetation, which possess specific tubular structures named aerenchyma that supply the underwater roots and rhizomes with oxygen.

Peat is desirable for a number of uses: from burning as a fuel, to use in potting mix and as an agricultural amendment. Peat is used as a soil conditioner because it can hold and retain up to 20 times its dry weight in water and in wetter conditions it can retain air in its cells. Peat also acidifies its surroundings by taking up cations, such as calcium and magnesium, and releasing hydrogen ions changing the cation exchange capacity (CEC) and through capillary action it attracts nutrients. Peat’s typical carbon to nitrogen ratio is 12:1, which encourages plant growth.

Peat & the global carbon cycle

Studies have demonstrated that the below ground plant tissues contribute a large amount to total plant production and therefore constitute a major component of the carbon and nutrient cycles in wetlands.

Peats are often differentiated from each other by the dominant plant material i.e. sphagnum moss peat, hypnum peat, reed peat, sedge peat, carex peat etc. As far as soil type distinction, peat falls under the classification of the organic soils – the histosols.



Peat ecosystems are a major player in the global carbon cycle because of the accumulation of carbon in the form of Peat.² About twice as much carbon is stored in the earth's soils than in the world's vegetation and atmosphere combined.³

The global carbon balance is maintained by soils releasing a slightly smaller amount of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than is reentering the soil via plant matter decomposition, therefore creating a small net accumulation per year and taking thousands of years to generate peat depth. This balance has been disturbed by human activities, such as burning fossil fuels (oil, coal & peat), deforestation, and soil degrading projects like draining wetlands for peat mining, farming and other human activities.

This change has been taking place more quickly since the Industrial Revolution and has now shifted to the extent that atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have risen dramatically in the past century from 290 to 370ppm. As climate change causes the peatlands to dry out in warmer climates, they release more carbon than they sequester, reversing the carbon sink cycle (a process called subsidence).

Peat mining

Most of Canada's peat is sphagnum fuscum peat moss in a slightly decomposed form. Bogs considered for harvesting are generally 50 hectares or more in size and must first be drained to dry the first layer to be harvested. As soon as the bog starts to dry, greenhouse gases begin to be emitted.

Ditches are placed 30 meters apart that drain into a perimeter ditch and after the top three to four inch-

es are dried, a harrowing machine "mills" the surface for complete drying and then vacuum harvesters remove up 100 acres per day and stack them in piles around the bog, to be transported to packing facilities.

Harvesting occurs between April and October. Mining continues over time until one meter of depth has been harvested and the muck layer, which was formed shortly after the last ice age, is reached. About 75% of the peat is considered professional-grade and 25% retail-grade.

The Canadian Sphagnum Moss Association has contracted with Veriflora Certification Systems to develop responsible peatland management standards that favor restoration of carbon accumulating wetland ecosystems after mining is finished. A draft standard for the industry was published in July 2010.⁴ One of the requirements in the draft document is that 10% of a bog ecosystem is set-aside as a "donor site" from which the bog will be restarted. Greenhouse gas emissions are monitored in the donor site, as well as water levels, in order to keep the donor ecosystem viable.

Canada's 1.1 million km² of peatlands are 25% of the world's peatland reserve and peat mining activity is currently being done on 162 km² of these peat reserves. The industry reports that virtually all of the economically viable peatlands have been claimed by a small number of industry stakeholders whose largest customer is the United States' horticultural market.

So, the real question then, is with Canada's peatlands and perma-

Both sphagnum moss and peat moss are permitted in the CAN/CGSB 32.311 PSL as long as they do not contain synthetic wetting agents.

frost's sequestering close to 20% of the world's soil-bound carbon, can Canada sustainably harvest peat and not contribute to a more rapid climate change even with peatland rehabilitation techniques in place? The industry thinks so and perhaps climate change itself is the greatest threat to the peatlands and the permafrost causing them to dry out and put the carbon sink into reverse gear. 🌱

Marjorie Harris, BSc, IOIA Adv.V.O., A.Ag, lives in Armstrong BC and works locally and internationally. She can be reached at marjorieharris@telus.net.

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- ² "Comparison of decomposition of belowground and aboveground plant litters in peatlands of boreal Alberta, Canada;" M.N. Thormann, S. E. Bayley, & R. S. Currah: June 12, 2000 NRC Research Press, pages 500 & 533.
- ³ The Nature and Properties of Soils (13th Ed.); Nyle C. Brady & Ray R. Weil, 2002 Pearson Education Inc.
- ⁴ Veriflora Certification for Responsible Peatland Management, July 2010.

Blogging, Posting, and Tweeting

~ FROM THE FARM ~

By Robin Tunnicliffe

Last fall at Saanich Organics, we had a firsthand lesson in the power of social networking from our farmhands. They had produced a risqué farm calendar called “Farmer Tans” during the summer and created a Facebook page for it. In no time, they had sold out two printings and had orders coming in fast and furious for the third run.

Around this same time, I called a friend of mine in the interior, just to chat, and he told me about this great calendar that his wife had ordered, without even realizing the connection. Granted, selling vegetables isn’t as sexy as hocking scantily clad farmers (sorry, the calendar is sold out), but the take home lesson was clear – social media sells.

A giant leap into the present

This spring, we took a giant leap into Farm Marketing 2.0. We roped those same entrepreneurial farmhands into making us a new website. After a few meetings to hammer out the content, we now have a new very professional-looking website with a blog, twitterfeed, and Facebook page to boot.

I had resisted all forms of social media because first of all, I didn’t use it and I didn’t “get” it. Second, I want to be out in the field rather than behind the computer so I’m reluctant to take on more desk work. However, during a marketing meeting in the winter, it became apparent that we all wanted to expand our production even though our sales from last season were down considerably.

Our business depends somewhat on tourism because of our restaurant sales, and tourism seems to be tanking. We had to fill the gap by reaching locals through direct marketing – the easiest and cheapest answer seemed to be social media.

The biggest challenge of all was opening my mind to the new reality. My initial impulse was to delegate the task to someone else – I couldn’t learn to update (wishful thinking). However, with a step-by-step instruction sheet that I keep by my computer, I can do it.

The WordPress program we use for the website is easy to use. I have always regretted that I don’t take more pictures of the farm in season, but now I walk the farm with an eye for a good post and I carry my phone with its built-in camera with me everywhere.

Generating the buzz

It was surprising to learn about all the “tweeting” and “following” going on through Twitter. When we tweeted about having loads of our first radishes at the market, our market coordinator “re-tweeted” our message to a few thousand Moss Street Market followers, and suddenly we had some followers of our own.

We haven’t been very consistent with our tweeting but I’ve learned that this is okay as long as we always tweet interesting and engaging things. We tweet about upcoming veggies, good work by our friends and allies – like great events or causes that are meaningful to us – and we also tweet while we are at events in order to generate buzz and remind people to come down.

The blog has turned out to be easier to maintain than I initially feared. We don’t keep to any schedule but blog when the inspiration hits. I blog about little things I see on the farm, just like I would do for our newsletter. We had a big hatch of tree frogs on the farm in mid-summer, so I took a picture and wrote about how delightful it was to have wee frogs bouncing everywhere.

At one point another of the Saanich Organics owners, Heather Stretch, needed a new dog. She posted her request and she had a number of people come forward with suggestions, and yes, she did get a new dog! We have shared our frustrations with slugs, deer and crows, and about big events happening on the farm like the annual zucchini bake-off. On average, a blog posting will take me 15 minutes from photo upload, to writing, to publishing.

On our company website, our audience is CSA and market customers, and chefs. We have a listing of this week’s offerings, the most recent CSA newsletters and a photo gallery.

We have also posted some videos showing people how to save seed from cabbage or how to make more space in their greenhouses. We record the videos on my iPhone, and we have a 30-second rule so they are small enough to upload to the blog and a one-take deal where we only film once. It's never perfect and it could take so much time that you'd never do it again. We think about what we want, and then we film it once. The raw uncut product is part of the appeal.

But does it work?

It is really hard to track the net effect of all this tweeting and blogging besides the obvious increase in the numbers of people liking us on Facebook and following our tweets. Certainly our vegetables aren't flying off the market table as did the saucy farmer photos, but social media is having a subtle effect.

It is definitely a prompt for more people to come out to the markets. I have been amazed by the different people who have approached us to tell us they've read and been inspired by the blog. We had a potential apprentice visit the farm last week and there was little new we could tell her because she had been following our blog all year. Our stories have fueled some good conversation at the market and with our CSA box customers who come out to the farm. And, we have developed some allies in the restaurant world because we follow the "Foodies in Victoria" list on twitter.

Ironically, these virtual connections have led to deeper relationships for us. I think it is building our networks and leading our "friends" to really get what we're about. There's no telling what will stem from these broader and deeper connections that we are creating, but I think it can only be good. 🌱

A taste of Facebook for farms:



About blogging...

Jordan Marr's blog "The Ruminant" is another example of farmers using new technologies to share information. The Ruminant is a blog that creates a space for farmers and gardeners to share good ideas, techniques and innovations by inviting them to submit photos with short descriptions. A typical post will choose a common farming task, for example seed germination, and showcase farmers' ideas and techniques for accomplishing said task. The site also contains book reviews of agriculturally themed books, new and old. Readers are also invited to submit their own book reviews for publication. www.theruminant.ca

Robin Tunnicliffe is a farmer with Saanich Organics on Southern Vancouver Island. She is co-author of All the Dirt: Three Farmers, Three Stories, One Business, published by Touchwood Publications and due to be released in early 2012. Robin sits on several boards of directors, including USC-Canada, and she holds an MA in Food Policy from the University of Victoria. www.saanichorganics.com

Twin Meadows Organics



Credit: Wendy Lowe

“It’s better than anywhere in BC for root crops. The rich river bottom soil gives excellent flavour,” says Garry.

“It’s the only interior temperate rainforest in BC,” says Wendy, “so we get a lot of moisture.”

I was surprised that they were growing grain there, but the climate in the valley is ideal for growing heirloom wheat, spelt, kamut, hulless barley and oats. All the moisture can be a problem for the grain though, and they sometimes have to use grain dryers before selling the whole grains. They plan to invest in a small commercial stone mill for customers who wish to purchase modest quantities of milled grain.

Garry and Wendy also hope to propagate enough heritage grain seed this year to sell to Salt Spring Seeds. They also grow the heritage seed varieties for seed banks like Seeds of Diversity and the Seed and Plant Sanctuary on Salt Spring Island. Their goal is to be self-sufficient with their own seed

supply within a couple of years.

As their website says, living and farming in such a remote area allows them to grow organic food and seed with little chance of contamination from other sources. They sell much of what they grow to Discovery Organics, a wholesale distributor based in Vancouver.

Ideally, they would like to reduce their carbon footprint by supplying markets closer to home. To that end, they have begun to cultivate business relationships in the area. One valued partnership is with The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. Garry and Wendy deliver carrots and other produce to them weekly – it seems the resort hotel can’t get enough of their eight varieties of coloured baby carrots.

By Spring Gillard

The first time I called Garry and Wendy Lowe at the appointed interview hour, there was no answer. That’s because cell phone service was down – the only phone service they have. In fact, there are no wires anywhere near their home as they are way off the grid in the fertile Robson Valley, between Prince George and Jasper. I was curious to learn how much growing they could be doing on land this far north. As it turns out, quite a lot.

Twin Meadows Organics is a 350-acre farm, seventy percent of which is surrounded by the Fraser River. On the 80 acres they have in cultivation, the couple grows heirloom vegetables, garlic, grain and seeds. They are certified with PACS.

The Executive Chef, Director of Food and Beverage and some of the chefs will be visiting the farm soon to see the gardens that supply their kitchens. When we spoke, they had just proposed a pilot program to the hotel, a kind of CSA (Community Shared Agriculture) arrangement that would see boxes of beautiful organic veggies delivered to the hotel once a week for their 800 employees.

An employee nutrition and health initiative may seem progressive for a hotel, but The Fairmont group has always been at the leading edge of sustainability. In 1990, the company launched their Green Partnership program. I recall a mid-scale worm composting system on the loading bay at The Fairmont Chateau Whistler and a rooftop herb garden at The Fairmont Waterfront in Vancouver long before green was fashionable.

In order to supply The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge with more produce, the Lowes are looking at ways to extend their four-month growing season. They already grow tomatoes, squash and pumpkins in hoop houses. They have a moveable greenhouse system on the drawing board too, developed by Eliot Coleman at Four Seasons Farm in Vermont. The greenhouse will enable them to extend the season to seven months.

“Living and farming in such a remote area allows them to grow organic food and seed with little chance of contamination from other sources.”

Garry and Wendy manage the farm themselves, with some part-time help from their children. “As the kids go off to university and work we’re trying to find the balance of how much we can do on our own,” says Garry.

From the beginning, their desire was to live as sustainable a life as possible. “We view it as more of a journey than a goal,” says Garry. Most of his professional life was spent in the computer industry. As he approached the half-century mark, he began to reevaluate his life. In his quest to find more balance, he retired early. At

about that time, he met Wendy, a former nurse and teacher who shared his values. Both of them avid gardeners, they began to create Twin Meadows Organics.

How they farm in this remote setting is a whole story of sustainability in itself. More and more, they use their Belgian horses to work the land and biodiesel when an engine is needed. Mostly, they rely on alternative



Ben and Jerry, the two powerful Belgians, start to look sleepy after a day of seeding. Credit: Wendy and Gary Lowe.

energy sources, such as wind and micro hydro. Garry is building an undershot waterwheel to capture energy from the top few inches of the small salmon creek that runs through their property. This passive energy system will be used to turn a low speed alternator (also custom built by Garry) that will charge the batteries that provide their electricity.

I have never been inspired to visit the Prince George area. But now, with formal invitation in hand, I can't wait to go off the grid to eat my fill of those baby carrots. 🥕

🔗 www.twinmeadowsorganics.com

Spring Gillard is a communications consultant, SFU sustainability instructor and author of Diary of a Compost Hotline Operator. She blogs at:

www.compostdiaries.com.



Garry and Wendy Lowe with their two Belgian Horses who do much of the work at the farm. Credit: Chantel Lowe

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Navigating Fall Markets



Credit: moss dance

By Dana Zaruba

It may only be the end of August as I write this, but for many market vendors we're already making plans for the November and December craft show season. The November sales season can constitute a large percentage of one's yearly gross revenue, so careful planning and preparation is critical to your success.

As farmers, attending these seasonal shows truly merits some exploration. Careful research and planning and making popular products will usually result in excellent sales. Consumable goods, like beautifully packaged gourmet food items always do well at the shows and command a premium price in some venues.

Fall and winter craft shows are creatures unto themselves, having quirks, tricks and strategies quite separate from running a weekly market stall. While they might sound like too much effort after an

exhausting summer, this end of the year sales push can be exceptionally profitable.

If you're new to the fall craft show season, there are some things to know that will help maximize your sales, and keep you organized and focused.

1 The first thing to consider is the application process and whether or not the show is adjudicated. Most of the established, high-end shows adjudicate, or judge, the quality, diversity and price points of all the applicants' product lines to create the best possible mix of vendors. Adjudicated shows generally have a high level of professionalism and quality, with fees anywhere from \$500-\$2000. However, there are dozens of excellent less expensive shows that are definitely worth doing. Many show organizers post applications online starting in early spring and require deposits or even full payment upon application. Good shows often have a big waiting list,

especially for the value-added food categories.

TIP: Talk to market vendors about which shows they like and why, apply early, and make sure you have enough money set aside to pay the fees and expenses associated with individual shows.

2 When assessing whether a show is a "good one," there are some important things to consider. I have found that shows allowing corporate vendors who sell home party goods and imported or manufactured goods often are not as good as those with goods made and sold by the vendors. This mix of corporate and artisan vendors confuses customers and can lower the perceived value of artisan goods. However, this mix can sometimes work to your advantage.

TIP: Professional shows may bring greater revenues, but also cost more. Smaller shows may be just as profitable if you keep your expenses low.

3 While it may be too late to get into shows for 2011, visit a few shows in your area and take a critical eye with you. Who are the vendors and what are they selling? Where are most customers actually spending their money and what are they buying? Good shows always have a great “buzz,” are busy, and people are walking around with lots of shopping bags.

TIP: Visit several different shows, take notes, and pay attention to what’s selling and what’s not.

4 At this time of year, people spend money on gifts and some personal indulgences. Food producers always do well at the shows especially if vendors offer samples of their products and provide recipes. One of today’s biggest trends is selling home canning, pickles and preserves, especially if they’re organic or low in sugar and sodium. Cheese makers, bakers or meat producers can do well if they provide lots of simple, holiday recipes.

TIP: Know your customers! Rural communities where everyone does their own canning might not need a pickle vendor, but you may do really well at an urban market.

5 Get the word out about your farm and in-season services, especially if you do CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) or farm gate sales. Provide literature along with your recipes and even early sign up sheets for your CSA program. This, itself can be a big push to developing your income for the next season and is a wonderful gift for customers looking for something different and special.

TIP: Use the shows as marketing tools for the entire year and build community awareness of your farming operation.

6 Use nice ribbon, gift boxes or anything else that says, “This is a beautiful gift!” It elevates a mere jar of jam to something someone would be proud to give and it also creates less work for the customer.

TIP: Create products that can be given directly as gifts and won’t make the customer do any extra work. Beautiful packaging really does make a difference!

7 Customers are always looking for a deal. Choose one main size and one sample size. Bundle the sample sizes into a gift pack and sell the larger sizes separately. Give discounts or add extra product when customers buy three or more but don’t offer too many deals.

TIP: Make pricing easy for customers, limit the size options of your products and only offer one or two good deals.

8 Make sure to start planning your production runs as early as you can. Order supplies and packaging as early as August because many of the suppliers run low at this time of year and you want to have all of your supplies on hand well before you do production. I recommend starting with one, maybe two shows, and see how you do. More shows also require more capital and you may need to hire staff to help you.

TIP: Plan production a lot farther ahead of the shows than you think is necessary. Start with one or two shows to get a sense of how much product you need.

9 Design big, easy-to-read signs. Lighting is also critical but many shows have limits on how much power you can use so choosing low wattage strings of mini lights and spotlights is key. While at this year’s shows, pay particular attention to how people light their

displays and hang their signs. Make sure to bring all the supplies you’ll need to set up an attractive booth.

TIP: Buy a dolly, extra bulbs, take power bars, extension cords, tape, zap straps, scissors, safety pins, a small folding step stool, anti-fatigue mats and a tall folding bar stool so you remain upright, but can rest a bit if you’re tired.

10 Finally, remember that you’re there representing yourself and your farm. The shows can be really tiring, but there’s really nothing quite like counting up a huge wad of cash at the end of the day. It will sure help your bank account during the dark winter months while you’re flipping through next year’s seed catalogues!

TIP: Smile, be friendly, dress in layers, wear comfortable shoes, bring your own healthy food, stay hydrated and bring lots of float money so you don’t run out.

Dana Zaruba is a vendor and writer from the Cowichan Valley. Her new book How to Run a Successful Market Stall provides many useful tips on developing, marketing and selling both food and craft products. Visit her website at www.overunity-press.com



got raw milk?

Legal Issues Drive Community Supported Dairies



EcoReality coop member Carol Wagner obtains a share of raw milk from herd queen Maya. Credit: Jan Steinman.

By Jan Steinman

By now, everyone has heard about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs as a way of involving the greater community in the production of their food. CSAs vary in form, from merely a way to collect payment “up-front” in order to finance the season’s production, to actively involving the greater community in planting, weeding, harvesting, and other farming activities.

Until recently, the CSA concept was largely limited to vegetable gardening, but it is increasingly seen as a way for individuals who don’t have the luxury of farmland and animals to enjoy dairy products as nature intended they be enjoyed – organic and raw, rather than engineered and industrialized.

It is illegal throughout Canada to sell or distribute unpasteurized milk. Health authorities claim that raw milk “may contain pathogens” as justification, while allowing the sale and distribution of far more dangerous foods like raw oysters and other shellfish. Even hamburger and spinach cause much more illness than carefully produced raw milk.

And yet, there is increasing demand for traditional foods, including carefully produced raw milk. Many

respected professionals, including medical doctors, nutritionists, and epidemiologists claim that carefully produced raw milk has much to offer over the industrially manufactured milk-like product that is commonly available. It contains its own immune system, with heat-sensitive enzymes like lactoferrin, a potent natural antibiotic, which is completely destroyed by pasteurization. Many other beneficial enzymes found in raw milk are destroyed, as is a significant portion of many water-soluble nutrients, such as Vitamin C.

There is one thing about raw milk that the health authorities got right – it contains bacteria – the naturally-occurring beneficial lactobacillus and acidophilus bacteria that consume lactose, or milk sugar, and produce

lactic acid, which is deadly to harmful bacteria such as *E. coli* and *Campylobacter jejuni*. Such “living milk” bacteria is considered so beneficial that industrial factory dairies add them back into certain dairy products after killing them with pasteurization, while charging consumers a premium for things like “probiotic” yogurt!

I always talk about “carefully produced raw milk” because not all raw milk is created equal. Raw milk produced by concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) cannot be produced safely. Indeed, industrial dairies depend on pasteurization to clean up any sanitary problems that occur in production, and people do get ill or even die when pasteurized milk is contaminated by raw milk that is intended for pasteurization. Health authorities often disingenuously cite such contamination as justification for banning carefully produced raw milk that is intended to be consumed raw.

But carefully produced raw milk has a nearly spotless health record – you are much more likely to be struck by lightning than to become ill from consuming carefully produced raw milk. There is general agreement that such milk comes from small herds of cows, goats, or sheep that are primarily fed naturally-occurring grass or browse, that the milk endures little or no pro-

cessing other than rapid chilling and filtering, and that organic practices be followed. It is often hand-milked, which can be more sensitive to potential problems, such as sub-clinical mastitis. Hand milking can also be more sanitary, as the pipes and tubes of milking machines can be difficult to keep clean.

So if this elixir is so good for you, and yet illegal, what is a health-conscious raw milk fan to do?

Luckily, there is a large loophole in the raw milk ban: the owner of a milk-producing animal is legally able to consume the milk produced by that animal. And Section Two of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives us “freedom of association,” or the freedom to collectively do that which it is legal to do individually. Thus, it is argued that a number of people can associate, pool their resources, and purchase a dairy animal and legally consume its milk, and even pay an agister, or person who cares for livestock owned by others, to care for the animal and milk it for them.

In 1990, an Ontario dairy farmer started providing carefully produced organic raw milk to cow co-owners, using the herd share model. In the twenty years since, Michael Schmidt has since undergone numerous raids and persecution by health authorities, culminating in twenty charges of willful violations of various health protection laws. On January 21, 2010, Schmidt was found not guilty of all charges in the Ontario Court of Justice in a scathing 44-page judgement.

By February 11, 2010, the Crown filed a five-page appeal, with a decision scheduled for September 16, 2011. So things may be different by the time you read this, but until this decision, the Ontario Court of Justice decision stands.

At EcoReality Co-op, we use our existing organization (as a BC Cooperative Association) as the herd share mechanism. We added a class of investment shares to segregate the herd share funds from other Co-op business. We are careful to limit the number of shares available to the actual value of our flock of Nubian goats and associated infrastructure, and we do not promise a certain quantity of milk. So, much as the sole owner of a cow or goat must be prepared to “take the bad with the good,” EcoReality dairy herd shareholders are not guaranteed a certain quantity of dairy product. These may well be important points in discriminating a true collective ownership situation from one that is merely a run around the prohibition of sale to the public.


We are currently supplying 37 dairy herd sharehold-

ers with organic, nutritious, non-processed traditional food, in much the same way as people enjoyed milk for some 12,000 years.

Of course, until the courts have spoken, there are risks in running a Community Supported Dairy operation. But we have been inundated with thanks for putting together this herd share and keeping normally law-abiding people from conducting criminal activity, simply because they want the right to control what they put in their bodies. The appreciation from our fellow herd shareholders is worth it! 🌿

Jan Steinman has been a stable hand, nightclub manager, trans-continental bike trip leader, electrical engineer, ski instructor, systems development consultant, magazine columnist, professional photographer, biodiesel brewer, and Permaculture instructor, but is now agister for EcoReality Co-op's herd of Nubian dairy goats.

You can learn more about the EcoReality Co-op herd share operation at:

 www.EcoReality.org/wiki/Dairy_herd_share_FAQ



The EcoReality Co-op goat flock is shared by over 30 herd shareholders. Credit: Jan Steinman

Interpreting the Organic Standard

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again...



by Nicole Boudreau

The Canadian Organic Standards (COS) were voluntary until 2009. They became mandatory when the Organic Products Regulations (OPR) were implemented in June 2009. The CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture (TC) met many times to revise the standards and make them fully applicable.

But transitioning from theory to practice is always challenging. Though revised by talented people, the standards can hardly cover all possible scenarios experienced in the real farming world. So, when the Canada Organic Office (COO), the CFIA agency responsible for the monitoring of the OPR, started receiving specific questions about how to apply the standards in given contexts, a decision was made to consult with a committee that would provide clarification on particular issues. The Canadian Standards Interpretation Committee (SIC) held its first meeting in December 2009.

Composed of seven members from the TC elected by the Organic Federation of Canada, the SIC analyzes, comments and tries to come to a consensus on the meaning of the standard in a given context.

Farmers need to be practical; they adhere to organic principles, but then need to apply or adapt the principles to their practices. And no one wants to lose certification for not having done the right thing.

More than 50 percent of the questions received by the SIC are about permitted substances. Some annotations defining the use of substances give “grounds for interpretation.” It is clear when the substance is prescribed “only” for a specific use or should be derived only from a specific process. But, sometimes the annotation is stated as a general comment that does not seem to exclude some other use. Furthermore, some substances are repeated in the same table or in two different tables with different annotations. Which annotation should be followed when using this substance? Operators will surely choose the prescription that best fits their needs. But what is the real intent of the standard?

The Canadian PSL is a list of permitted substances. But what if a substance is not included? Many questions were issued about “absent” substances. There are general directives about the use of substances not registered on the PSL; they should comply with the general principles of 1.4.1. But operators want to be reassured about their practices.

There is also ambiguity with processes from which allowable substances are derived, and though the market availability of some substances can be a burden, the restrictions on acceptable processes of production

Continued on page 27...

Fixing the “N”

Cover Crop Research at UBC Farm



Fig. 3 Barley produced seed head by May 3, 2010.

By Kristi Hatakka and Art Bomke

Cover crops are used in agricultural systems to improve soil structure, suppress weeds, reduce soil erosion, and to contribute nitrogen or prevent leaching losses after harvest. Many of the cover crops grown on the UBC Farm serve different functions in their agroecosystem.

Cereal grains such as fall rye and winter wheat are staple late season



Fig. 1 Fall rye and vetch planted in a bed in early September and harvested May 1, 2010.

cover crops that provide ground cover and may trap nitrogen left in the soil after the growing season. Oats and barley, when seeded early enough, often “winter kill,” producing a straw mulch that smothers spring weeds. Italian ryegrass is used as a field border and can generate a fair amount of biomass quite quickly in the spring. Crimson clover, Dutch or ladino white clover, hairy vetch, and Austrian winter peas are the leguminous cover crops used on the farm.

Nitrogen fixation

Legumes biologically fix nitrogen from the atmosphere, which is then released into the soil once the turned-in green matter decomposes. Inoculation of the legume seeds with the *Rhizobium* bacteria specific to that species is required to ensure that the legumes are being utilized to their fullest nitrogen-fixing potential. Once a rhizobial network for a particular legume is well established in a field inoculation is often not required in subsequent years.

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Fig. 2 Fall rye and vetch alley sampled May 3, 2010.



Fig. 4. Winter wheat, peas, and vetch sampled May 1, 2010.



Fig 5. Hairy vetch sampled May 6, 2010.

Legumes benefit from being grown as a mixture with a nurse crop such as a grass or cereal grain. Vetch and peas will climb the nurse crops and spread their leaves to gain better access to the sun. The nurse crop also adds more biomass and therefore organic matter, which helps to improve the soil structure. The UBC Farm often plants ryegrass and clover or a grain and legume mix in the alleys during the summer and relies on fall rye and vetch closer to the fall.

Each cover crop serves a particular role in the farm's production system and detailed records are needed to plan the rotation with the cash crops. Recording the seeding date and rate of the specific cover crops planted in each area is required in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the cover crops.

Over the past year we analyzed the cover cropping system at the UBC Farm to determine if the set objectives for the cover crops were being met. The study began with an





inventory of the cover crops used in all the production areas. In order to compare the different cover crops, we determined the amount of dry matter (DM) present for a variety of mixes in certain fields from March to May by clipping the above ground biomass from within six 0.5m x 0.5m areas per field sampled. Total nitrogen values were obtained from Pacific Soil Analysis Inc., a laboratory in Richmond BC.

Our intention was to use the cover crop calculator developed by Dan

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Sullivan and Nick Andrews at Oregon State University to estimate the amount of plant available nitrogen (PAN) being added to the soil from the incorporation of these cover crops in the spring.

Cover crop calculator

This calculator can be used as a tool for farmers to develop a balanced nutrient management plan based on the type of cover crops, fertilizer, and practices used on their farm. The total fresh weight of the six samples, along with the percent DM and total nitrogen values obtained from a soil and plant-testing laboratory are needed in order to use the calculator to estimate the total nitrogen and PAN generated by the cover crops.

From the mineralization models and research conducted at OSU they found that after 28 days nitrogen was already being released from the decomposition of the incorporated cover crops. After 51 days nearly all of the nitrogen is mobilized from the green manure with only minor increases occurring up to 70 days post incorporation. To access the calculator and the quick guide sampling instructions go to www.smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/calculator.

Results

Fall rye + hairy vetch: In the first week of May a late planted cover of fall rye and vetch that had produced 3010kg/ha of above ground DM with 2.89% N was estimated to have 87 kg/ha of total nitrogen and 33kg/ha of PAN.

Another stand of rye and vetch with twice as much biomass (6980kg/ha) and only 1.37% N would contribute 96kg/ha of total nitrogen of which only 9kg/ha would be plant available. This alley was 110cm tall, compared to only 46cm for the late planted bed, and contained a much higher proportion of cereal grain than legume.

Cereal grain + legume mixes: A mix of barley, crimson, and white clover produced 5860kg/ha of biomass, with a nitrogen content of 2.31%, generated an estimate of 135kg/ha of total nitrogen with 38 kg/ha becoming plant available based on the cover crop calculator.

Another mix that was quite successful in terms of contributing nitrogen was winter wheat, peas, and vetch. This cover crop combination, sampled on May 1, 2010, had 4370kg/ha and 2.34% N. The predicted total nitrogen value was 102kg/ha and 29 kg/ha for PAN.

1 Nitrogen fixer: After one month the amount of PAN in a pure stand of vetch increased by 42%. The estimated total nitrogen contribution was 155kg/ha with 79kg/ha becoming available from 4100kg/ha of DM.

Conclusions & future research

The UBC Farm could benefit from the addition of more nitrogen into their soils by optimizing the performance of the cover crops in terms of nitrogen fixation. The other objectives – weed suppression and soil coverage – are being met by the cereal grains and grass/legume mixes that are currently a part of the cover crop program. Each cover crop fits into a specific niche, but overall the vast selection creates more biodiversity in the farm's production system.

We've determined that further research to validate the OSU cover crop calculator in terms of the microclimate and conditions of the UBC Farm and South Coastal BC would be valuable. Taking soil samples and conducting incubation studies to compare the predicted values to the real nitrogen values obtained after the cover crops were incorporated in the spring could be one way to achieve this. 🌱

Kristi Hatakka has a BSc in Agroecology from the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Dr. Art Bomke, an Associate Professor in Agroecology/Soils in the UBC Faculty of Land and Food Systems, supervised the project.

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... *Interpreting the COS, continued from page 23*

must be restated. Specific production requirements are also questioned; some operators want to confirm that the general principles of the COS also apply to specific crops, which are perceived as being “aside” the main cropping systems.

Some questions are simple: the answer is yes or no. But other questions are more complex and others cannot be clearly interpreted, revealing a gap or a lack of clarity. The SIC has no authority to revise the COS and has to be very careful to avoid rewriting the standards; interpreting is reading what is stated and clarifying the original intent of the authors, not going beyond what was written.

If faced with a question that highlights an instance of ambiguity or apparent contradiction in the wording of the Standard, the SIC may propose a revision which would involve the CGSB Technical Committee (the group legally responsible for the maintenance of the Standard). Moreover, the PSL proposals being currently subject to ballot or are on the work list of PSL working groups cannot be considered – they are not applicable to the work of the SIC until they are inserted in published standards amendments.

The SIC interprets questions and issues answers that are posted on the COO website to undergo a 60-day comment period. This comment period is a clear indication that the standards are really managed by the whole sector. Should a comment challenge a proposed interpretation, the SIC will bring the question back for further discussion, where the comment will be considered and a decision will be made whether or not to revise the answer. The main purpose of the SIC is to assure uniform application of the rules to all operators and CBs. The questions and answers are posted on the COO website. Questions should be sent to the COO.



This article was written by Nicole Boudreau, Organic Federation of Canada, on behalf of the OACC with funding provided by Canada's Organic Science Cluster (a part of the Canadian Agri-Science Clusters Initiative of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Growing Forward Policy Framework). The Organic Science Cluster is a collaborative effort led jointly by the OACC, the Organic Federation of Canada and industry partners. OACC newspaper articles are archived at www.oacc.info one month after publication. For more information: 902-893-7256 or oacc@nsac.ca.





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Richmond's DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

By Arzeena Hamir

It's berry season, and I'm seeing lots of fruit stands popping up around the edge of the city. Families are stocking up for jam making and to freeze for the winter. But do people know exactly what they're buying?

There's an issue about our farms here in Richmond that needs to be aired. On a weekly basis, I get emails from individuals, buying groups, and companies asking for organic fruits and vegetables. They contact the Richmond Food Security Society since we publish a local food guide on our website.

It's with great sadness that I have to turn them away and send them into the valley. Why? Richmond does not have one single certified organic vegetable or berry farm. Does that surprise you? It might, since many small growers along Blundell and Granville advertise their product as "organic."

Not only is that not true, it's highly unethical. Organic growers have to go through stringent processes to prove that they manage their farms organically. Their farms are inspected yearly, a buffer has to be grown so that no sprays come in from nearby farms, and they have to keep every single scrap of paper to show what inputs were purchased and how soil fertility and pest management was practiced. The cost of certification is high, both in time and money.

But for those farmers who are willing to go through the process, I can rest assured that someone has checked up on them. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for some of our local farms. Watching the practices of our blueberry growers, for instance, I can say without hesitation that there is not one blueberry grower in the McLennan area that does not have either Round-up and/or a fungicide sprayed on their fields.

And yet, I still see the term "unsprayed" on farm signs. What does that mean? Often, the farmer is implying that the berries themselves have not been sprayed. But, if you ask them what they use for weed control, or if any fungicide or insecticide was used prior to flowering, you often get... silence. It's the dirty little secret that we've all turned a blind eye to. And it's not fair.



Credit: moss dance

I would love to see more organic farms in Richmond where I could trust that what is claimed is actually true. I can't understand why more growers would not want to convert to organic. The price for local, organic strawberries is \$5/lb and I'm stocking up at the Oak Street Farmers market.

About a year ago, I noticed that Nature's Path Foods was looking to purchase about a million pounds of certified organic blueberries. Their offices are here in Richmond and their processing plant is in Delta. Where did they end up getting their blueberries? Eastern Canada. What was the dollar value that local blueberry growers lost out on (and continue to lose)? \$2.7 million per year.

What will it take to turn this around? It's hard to say. Maybe a new generation of farmers will put in some time and effort to grow sustainably. The bottom line is that consumers certainly need to know what our money is supporting. And right now, it's not supporting pesticide-free food. 🌿

Arzeena Hamir is co-ordinator of the Richmond Food Security Society. This article was inspired by discussions on the COABC listserv.

🌿 www.richmondfoodsecurity.org



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Sponsorship Programs



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Events and Announcements

14th Annual Pacific Agriculture Show, Tradex Exhibition Centre (Abbotsford Airport), Abbotsford, BC, January 26-28, 2012. For more information www.agricultureshow.net

Celebrating organics event at Oak Street Organic Market at 49th and Granville, Vancouver, Wednesday October 19, 2011, for National Organic Week.

Agri-Recovery 2011 (BC Excess Moisture Initiative) package for vegetable growers is now available on the BCAGRI website: www.agf.gov.bc.ca/rm/index.htm The 2011 Canada-BC Excess Moisture Initiative is to assist vegetable producers in specific regions of British Columbia with the impacts of excessive moisture in 2010 and spring of 2011. Payments are based on 2011 acres seeded to eligible vegetable crops.

British Columbia Farm Animal Care Council Conference, Thursday,

November 10, Abbotsford, BC. Tickets are \$168 per person. For more information www.bcfacc.ca/conference.htm or call 604.287.3276

The Organic Federation of Canada is seeking your input on their blog. What is the impact of having organic products that are not certified in intraprovincial markets? The OFC thinks that time has come to assess the impact of the lack of intraprovincial organic regulations in a majority of Canadian provinces. You are invited to post your comments on this issue on their blog: <http://ofcfbc.wordpress.com/>

Fund for renewable energy in agriculture - applications are now being accepted from B.C. producers who want to incorporate renewable energy technologies into their existing agricultural and agri-food operations. For more information on the Growing Forward programs, visit: www.al.gov.bc.ca/apf/GF_

CLASSIFIEDS

Place your classified ad in the BC Organic Grower for only \$25/issue!

For more information, contact moss at: bcogadvertising@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

The Value Chain Development Fund has been created by the BC and Federal governments to assist industry stakeholders in BC with the creation of a value chain development plan. The Value Chain Development Fund is available to expand the use of value chains for food products grown in BC. The program will reimburse 75% of eligible expenses accrued during the creation of a value chain development plan up to a maximum of \$5,000. More information, including the Program Guidelines and Application Form, is located at: www.agf.gov.bc.ca/ministry/bc_value_chain_fund/BC_food_value_chain.htm

Husky Mohawk Community Rebate Program



COABC is involved with the Husky Mohawk Community Rebate Program in order to raise additional funds for the organisation. Husky forwards 2% of the loyalty card users' purchases to COABC in the form of a rebate. All COABC members were sent a card in 2005 and a small amount of members have been using the card resulting in an average rebate of \$30 per quarter. We still need more help to raise funds using this loyalty program.

If you would like to receive a card or additional cards, please contact the COABC office at (250) 260-4429 or email us at office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

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| 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 Consent to use Official Marks Declaration Form (July 2006 revision)? Y/N With which products will you be using the packaging materials? _____ _____ | | | | | |
| Promo Materials: available to everyone | Member \$ | Non-member \$ | Tax | | |
| Bucket Hats size M or L * | \$15.75 | \$15.75 | HST taxable | | |
| Ball Caps | \$13.10 | \$13.10 | HST taxable | | |
| Green T-shirts L or XL * | \$18.00 | \$18.00 | HST taxable | | |
| Natural T-shirts (Logo) M or L* | \$7.25 | \$7.25 | HST taxable | | |
| Natural T-shirts (Plain) S M L XL or XXL | \$5.00 | \$5.00 | HST taxable | | |
| Organic Tree Fruit Management | \$19.95 | \$25.95 | HST exempt (5% GST) | | |
| Steel in the Field * | \$25.00 | \$25.00 | HST exempt (5% GST) | | |
| | | | | Sub-total (before taxes and shipping): | |

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An invoice will be sent with your order. Postage and applicable taxes will be added to your invoice.
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Part of a Bread Affair's business philosophy is to grow by aligning with organizations that share its values, like Vancity. Vancity provided the bakery with a line of credit and term loans to fund renovations and expansion. As a result this busy bakery has doubled bread production at its new facility in Langley.

We'd love to talk to you about **your** plans to grow local, natural and organic. Tell us how we can support your business or initiative at localandorganic@vancity.com or **604.709.5859**.

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