

British Columbia

Organic Grower



In this issue:

BC Seeds Gathering, Wildlife Management, Farm Animal Codes of Practice, Farm Newsletter Tips, Three Sisters Farm, 2013 COABC Conference

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Organics: Past, Present & Future

Get the scoop on this year's COABC conference! Details and registration info on page 16

BC Organic Grower

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Note from the Executive

“Tuum Est” roughly translated: “It is up to you.”

~ Motto of the University of British Columbia

By Kris Chand, Vice Chair, on behalf of the Executive

Your volunteer executive has spent an eventful year to:




- Align the COABC as an integral and important member of BC Agriculture Association (BCAC)
- Raise the profile of COABC at the ministerial level in the government of BC
- Re-establish the ex-officio position for COABC by the BC Ministry of Agriculture
- Formalize the process of the annual “Organic Week” declaration in BC
- Undertake research to address the barriers to Small Scale Certification, to be completed by April 2013
- Create a five-year Strategic Plan for BC’s organic sector. The COABC will lead the Organic Sector, which will include major stake holders (wholesalers, retailers, other accreditation bodies etc).

While doing this foundational work, the staff and the executive have, to the best of our abilities, provided support to our members and carry out the core functions of the COABC.

As your executive, we feel that a strong foundation of good will, receptivity, cooperation and recognition of the COABC in BC has been established with the major decision makers both in the government and other major players who, directly and indirectly, will play a part in the evolution of BC’s organic sector.

The new organic sector in BC will be a vibrant and forceful player in a food sector where organic is the fastest growing component. We are convinced that COABC members will benefit greatly if you, as creative and high energy operators, become more involved in its evolution. We urge you to do just that through your Certification Body.

Over four decades ago I was handed a piece of paper as proof that I had completed my academic studies at

UBC. On it, in large print, was the phrase: “Tuum est” – it is up to you. That has been one of the guiding principles for me in everything I have undertaken. As I take leave from the COABC for personal reasons, I say: “TUUM EST.” 



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Administrator's Report

Two thousand and thirteen will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Certified Organic Associations of BC. Over the past 20 years, COABC has helped build the BC organic community and sector. This year we celebrate the accomplishments of our community and envision the future of our growing sector.



The conference will commemorate this milestone with the theme "Organics: Past, Present, and Future." As we celebrate our collective history with displays and stories, we will also cast an eye to the future with speakers addressing current topics such as permaculture and genetic engineering.

The conference coordinators and committee have been working hard to create a great line-up of presenters. As always the conference is open to the general public so please encourage everyone who may be interested to attend.

We are also excited to welcome the Organic Federation of Canada (OFC) to BC. OFC has decided to hold their AGM and to celebrate their fifth anniversary in conjunction with our conference this year.

Registration is now open! Register at our website to hold your spot. The early bird pricing is in effect until January 31, 2013. Join us in Vernon at the Prestige Inn from February 22-24, 2013.

Help spread the word and watch for conference updates on the COABC website, our facebook page and our twitter account. 🌱

🌐 www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca
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Celebrating 20 Years Together

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Certified Organic Associations of BC

Last Quarter Achievements

- National Organic Week Events including COABC executive meeting with the Minister of Agriculture at the Organic Okanagan Festival
- Organic Week proclamation by the provincial government
- Distributed 1000 additional copies of the BCOG for Organic Week
- Finalized 3rd Quarter financials



Celebrating 22 Years

Pro Organics is proud to represent BC organic producers and to be celebrating our 22nd year of supporting local, organic, sustainable farming.

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Editor's Note

As we put this issue of the BCOG to bed, the darkness of winter is descending upon us, with the promise that the light will return soon and another growing season will begin.

For myself and Moss Dance, this Winter Issue marks the end of our fourth year editing and designing this publication for organic growers in our lovely province.

From keyboard to page, we are reminded with every issue that the organic community is about more than just food, about more than just the amazing people in this community, it is about something that is much bigger than all of us – the balance of life on our little planet.



Andrea Langlois, editor



Moss Dance, layout

So, as I write the smallest editor's note ever to fit into this wee spot, I would just like to wish everyone a wonderful arrival into 2013. The pages of this issue are packed with amazing ideas, stories, and images from your community of organic growers. We hope you will enjoy reading them somewhere warm and cozy.

A big thank you from both of us for all the generosity you show this small publication. Feel free to be in touch with your ideas and words: editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

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A Stellar Future Planting Seeds of Resilience



Patrick at market. Credit: Colleen O'Brien



Colleen harvesting salad greens at the farm
Credit: Patrick Steiner

By Hannah Roessler

The landslide that hit Johnson's Landing this past July was one of many bumps along the road for Patrick Steiner and Colleen O'Brien, owners of Stellar Seeds and producers of some of British Columbia's finest seeds. Even before the landslide that knocked out their water supply from mid-summer onwards they were dealing with several on-farm challenges.

"We'll probably be picking rocks out of this land for the next 20 years," says Patrick. "It's a pretty hard property to farm; the most challenging one I've farmed yet. No previous infrastructure – we had to put in fencing, turn over raw land, it's all sloped, low-fertility, mountain-side land."

"We moved to a very raw piece of land, a big empty field," Colleen agrees, and I hear the smile in her voice over the phone. "Fun, but daunting at the same time."

It may be tough, but these two farmers are no strangers to the many varied quandaries faced by many small-scale organic growers. After learning and building experience for many years while apprenticing on other peoples farms, they are happy to finally have a place to call their own in Johnson's Landing.

For the past two years they have been growing a variety of market crops, layers, meat birds, experimenting with goats and ducks, all the while still trying to find the "best fit" for their new 4-acre farm. Though located on a challenging piece of land, their farm is blessed

with great sun exposure, a long-growing season, and hot summers. All in all, the perfect recipe for helping them do what they do best – grow seed.

Patrick and Colleen initially began their foray into seed saving because they noticed a lack of organic seeds on the market. They dreamt of a wider breadth of biological diversity for growers, such as themselves, through a wider availability of seeds. This dream was also driven by concerns over larger seed producers taking over the seed-market, who also tend to focus on fewer varieties, thereby excluding the menagerie of rare and unique varieties that are potentially valuable food crops.

Patrick and Colleen therefore focus on heritage varieties and open pollinated seeds, but have simultaneously fine-tuned and expanded their initial vision as seed producers. They are now focusing on three main areas: producing seeds of exceptional quality, quantity, and utility. They market seeds from other producers, thereby providing for more genetic diversity, as well as providing bulk seed order options.

They also offer varieties that are the "standards" for farmers and gardeners, in addition to those varieties that are unique and hard to find. "As you know, the small scale farmer wants to be able to provide unique and rare varieties to their markets," says Patrick.

When I ask what sorts of unique varieties people typically wanted, they list things such as slightly differ-

ently shaped onions, different coloured beans and, “Carrots, always carrots,” says Colleen with a laugh.

It’s clear that Patrick and Colleen really appreciate engaging with their customers. They started a blog on their website in order to keep in touch with the customers they didn’t get to see regularly. “We want to bridge that communication gap. At our market we sit and talk to people, but our seed customers do a seed order just once a year, so we want to try and have more regular communication,” explains Patrick.

While a great way to communicate with customers or with other peers in the farming community, they also see their blog and website as a teaching tool. Patrick and Colleen try post up-to-date information about what they are doing on the farm, explaining how they do it and why, thereby really sharing their experiences and learning.

An important part of their farming system is teaching new growers, and they do this not only online but by regularly taking on farm interns through the SOIL program, and by giving workshops on seed saving in their community and beyond. Their website also has a resource page where you will find an informative beginners guide to gardening, as well as a handbook on small-scale organic seed production.

“We are always in the process of learning about farming ourselves,” says Patrick. “We want to go to workshops and learn from others as well. I want as much as anything to learn from our farming peers, you can’t always rely on yourself, you need the community.”

Supporting Local Seed Production

The importance of community rang true this past July when Colleen and Patrick were required to evacuate their farm and crops when a massive landslide hit their area. While their farm was not directly hit, their water source was compromised and they went without irrigation for the rest of the summer.

“Our farm insurance didn’t cover landslides, and disaster relief programs through the government didn’t cover lost income. And, our baby was two weeks old at the time,” says Patrick.


It goes without saying that Patrick and Colleen had a significantly difficult season. In the twelve years that they have been operating Stellar Seeds, this year yielded their poorest seed crop ever.

They are working hard to bring things back into balance as best as they can, continuing to work on providing BC growers with high quality, certified organic, GMO-free, open-pollinated seed. Colleen answers

slowly and thoughtfully when I ask her what her favourite seeds are, “I don’t know if I have a favourite. Whatever is new and exciting. I get excited to know when to harvest it, when to clean it, how it forms... it’s all kind of exciting.”

Even with the diverse challenges they have faced, the passion is clear in their voices when they speak of sharing their knowledge with new growers, learning from other growers and, of course, seed production.

Growers in BC are lucky to have Colleen and Patrick as a resource – they provide us with both quality seeds and the knowledge of how to save our own. The struggles of our seed producers are our very own struggles; if we are striving for a more resilient food system in BC, we need to make it possible for seed producers to continue their valuable work.

If you want to know more about how you can give them a hand, please visit their website. 

 stellarseedsrecovery.com

Hannah Roessler has farmed in Nicaragua, Washington and BC on organic farms, permaculture projects, mixed-crop cafetals, and a biodynamic vineyard. She is finishing her MA in Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria.



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Three Sisters Farm



Top to bottom: Dave with bees; bean growing up corn stalk; winter squash. Credit: Katy Latham

By Spring Gillard

As you might suspect, the name Three Sisters Farm was inspired by the Mayan (and other indigenous peoples') tradition of planting corn, squash and beans together. The three companions nourish and support each other. The beans wind their way up the tall corn stalks, stabilizing the corn plants and fixing nitrogen in the soil. The squash sprawl contently at their sisters' feet, serving as a living mulch, preserving moisture and deterring weeds and pests.

It was Katy Latham's sister who came up with the name and yes, there are three sisters in the family. Family and friends have all pitched in to get this farm up and running, but the everyday farm hands are Katy, her boyfriend David Cox, and her mom Joan Fallis. Three Sisters Farm is certified by the Pacific Agriculture Certification Society (PACS).

In 2004, Katy graduated from McGill's school of environment in ecological agriculture and then worked on a number of organic farms in BC, Alberta and overseas. Five years later, she enrolled in UBC Farm's eight-month practicum in sustainable agriculture. She and her family had been looking for property in BC while she was at school, and the moment she finished the farm program, they moved to the wooded three-acre property they had purchased in Gibsons on the Sunshine Coast.

When it came to clearing the land, the trio got some much needed help from their resident dairy goats. They made a very conscious decision to raise goats rather than sheep. "Goats eat the local forage," said Katy, "sheep don't."

Apparently goats love blackberries and salmonberries, which means the animals help to keep the forest from creeping into the planted areas, a mix of vegetables, berries, herbs and edible flowers. The goats also provide milk for the family's personal use. There is an apple orchard on the drawing board, but the goats haven't cleared the land yet!

It's not only the goats that help with clearing, the chickens feed on local forage too. "All those greens make their yolks really orange," said Katy. It increases the quality of the eggs and makes them less reliant on expensive grain feed. The eggs are a real draw. "People come for the eggs and then they buy other things," she said.

“They made a very conscious decision to raise goats rather than sheep. ‘Goats eat the local forage,’ said Katy, ‘sheep don’t.”

The 70 hens lay five dozen eggs a day and every day they sell out. Joan is in charge of the flock. Her qualifications? Katy claims she’s a natural, but her mom did grow up on a farm with chickens in rural Manitoba. When the hens reach the end of their laying days, David handles the slaughtering side of the business. The farm has an on-site slaughtering license. He also tends two beehives. “We don’t sell honey yet,” said Katy. “But the bees are awesome pollinators!”

During the summer months, loyal patrons flock to the stand set up at the end of the driveway. As is the custom in many rural locations, these farmers get paid on the honor system. Customers select their fresh produce and eggs and drop their payment into the coin box. They also sell their goods at three farmers markets on the Sunshine coast.

Katy is a founding member of the Gibsons Farm Collective – the three partner farms provide an on-line ordering service. Each week, regular customers receive a fresh sheet. They submit their custom order and then pick up their box at the farm during designated hours. Katy’s customers prefer that option in the winter



Credit: Katy Latham

months. Through the collective, Katy is able to offer a wider selection of items and it lightens the paperwork load for all. With all of these marketing options, Katy doesn’t have to leave the Sunshine Coast to sell her product.





Selling or sourcing materials off the coast is a real consideration when it comes to the bottom line. “There’s real value in getting things nearby,” says Katy.

They purchase hay, straw and feed from the Fraser Valley. “Even a few dollars a bag in shipping costs

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Milking the dairy goats (left) Credit: Katy Latham
Katy staffing the farm gate. Credit: Jenn Upham

can really add up.” Gas and ferry rides are expensive too, so they try to keep their trips off the coast to a minimum. Instead, the farmers work creatively with the materials at hand. For example, they constructed their greenhouses from scrap metal. They find many reusable items at the Gibsons Recycling Depot.

Katy and her family love living in this idyllic setting, at the foot of Mount Elphinstone.

So far, the debt load is low because they haven’t made any large investments in the farm. Thanks to Environmental Farm Plan funding, they did install a kilometre of temporary electric fencing, so they can move the chickens into new foraging areas. They aren’t in a hurry to scale up. Katy supplements her farm income by working part time at a neighbouring farm.

Finally, I had to ask: so do you grow corn, beans and squash? “Yes, a large patch every year,” Katy laughs.

She grows a selection of pumpkins, like Rouge Vif D’Etampes and New England Pie, as well as acorns, buttercup, sweet dumpling, red kuri and hubbards. “I cure the squash to sell with the eggs and a few greens during the winter,” Katy says.

She finds that the dried beans work best – fresh are too hard to pick in a dense cornfield. Words of wisdom from one of three sisters. 🌿

Spring Gillard is a communications consultant, SFU sustainability instructor and author of Something’s Rotten in Compost City, A Primer on the Politics of Food (Smashwords Edition 2011). She blogs at www.compostdiaries.com.

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One Piece of the Puzzle

The Price of Food at Farmers' Markets



Elizabeth Quinn, BCAFM Executive Director at the Trout Lake Farmers' Market in Vancouver this past summer picking up some berries. Photo credit: Brian Harris

By Elizabeth Quinn and Georgia Stanley

Farmers' markets and local food have continued to receive a lot of attention and public support over the last couple of years and despite our high profile and great public appeal, we often consider how we could be more effective in reaching the mainstream population and the average shopper.

A very common critique of farmers' markets and local food in general, which has popped up in the media recently, is that it is too expensive. Earlier this year, during the launch of the Farmers' Market Nutrition and Coupon Program (FMNCP) two journalists commented that farmers' market prices are "expensive and how could this be good for low income families?"

We've heard similar criticism from nutritionists working in food security and from local politicians. However, if we are going to attract more customers to shop at farmers' markets, we need to address and overcome the impression that farmers' markets are more expensive than other food outlets.

This criticism was the impetus for the BCAFM to embark on our own investigation into food prices at farmers' markets this past fall. And although we cannot say that our findings are conclusive, they did shed some light and demonstrate a need for further independent research on the issue.

During site visits to communities around the province, Peter Leblanc, the FMNCP Program Manager, collected data on produce prices at farmers' markets and nearby grocery stores. In ten BC communities, conventional and organic BC grown products at the farmers' market were found to be the same price or less than the same BC grown products at the grocery store.

The results demonstrate that farmers' markets offer competitive prices for locally grown conventional and organic produce and that when we compare apples to apples (local to local), farmers' market prices are not more expensive and are sometimes lower. We consciously decided not to tackle a price comparison between local and imported produce at this time, but we do appreciate that there is a need for continued education about why local can cost more.

This is a small finding, but it is one more tool that we can use to raise awareness about local food. Please share this message with your customers and your colleagues and don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@bcfarmersmarket.org.

Elizabeth Quinn and Georgia Stanley work for the BC Association of Farmers' Markets. The BCAFM is a not-for-profit association, representing 111 farmers' markets in BC. The Association is committed to developing and strengthening the capacity of farmers' markets throughout BC.

Bears, Bats and Ticks, Oh My!

By Margaret Holm

Many organic farms have property lines edged with natural habitat. These wild areas offer travel corridors for critters that also like to visit your property. OSCA, the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, works with agricultural groups to offer wildlife management workshops and information. Over the next few issues, I will be writing about options for wildlife species management. Winter is a good time to assess your property and consider getting ready for spring and the challenges that wildlife often poses.

Bears

Bears are a natural part of all regions of our province and are usually not aggressive, but when they get a taste for high-calorie fruit, garbage, and pet food they become bolder, returning repeatedly to properties in broad daylight and impacting worker safety and productivity. Because bears travel widely, it is critical that agricultural properties and communities work together to manage bear attractants. Once a bear is attracted to fruit on your property almost nothing keeps it out.

In many regions of North America, the Black Bear population has adapted to human communities and is increasing in size. The Ministry of Environment recommends using dogs to help keep bears away as well as propane scare guns and air horns to make bears uneasy about visiting a property. Thinning brush near natural bear pathways helps, as does storing picked fruit securely behind closed doors and burying or removing spoils.

Installing electric fencing is the most effective method to keep out bears, and can be cost effective when installed along existing fences. Electric fencing must be four feet high with a quick pulse, and must have metal, not wooden, posts. At least one wire should run close to the ground to discourage bears from digging underneath fences. Even electric fencing is only effective if it is installed early in the year before a bear is habituated to a food source. If an electric fence is working early in the season and the bruin gets zapped, it will remember and avoid your property.

Orchards attract bears when bee hives are brought in for pollination. Honey producers with bee yards need to put up electric fencing before bears can gain access

to the irresistible taste of honey. This wasn't necessary a few years ago – but now it is. Strapping the hives together and putting them on an elevated platform, and using electrified posts to support the platform is effective but it must be done before bears start exploring their territories in spring.

Because there are few alternative control methods, BC Conservation Officers usually put-down over 500 “problem” bears each year. More than \$1 million a year is spent responding to bear complaints and property damage and losses to agriculture are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Ministry of Environment Conservation Officer Service is only able to respond to wildlife calls that threaten public safety, so the service concentrates on populated residential areas. It is largely up to agricultural property owners to take responsibility for fencing wildlife out.

Bats

Bats play an important role in nature, consuming vast quantities of insects, some of which are costly agricultural pests either in their larval or adult form. Many insects sense a bat's echolocation signals and avoid areas where bats are feeding – so a healthy bat population is definitely a big plus for agricultural producers.

Bats use temporary daytime roosts in trees, rock crevices, and human-made structures. If you don't want bats roosting in your farm buildings, winter is the time to seal up those cracks and crevices with metal flashing or wood. If you think you have a maternal colony where a number of females and young roost and their presence is causing a problem, you can seal up the opening after November when the bats have migrated out of the area.

Loss of habitat, lack of roosting sites, environmental contaminants, and new diseases affect bat populations, so bats could use some help. Luckily many orchard and vineyard owners realize the benefits of bats and have erected bat houses on their properties.

Ken and Mellhina Thibault of Casa del Mell Orchard in Osoyoos put up bat boxes in 2009 as part of wildlife friendly initiatives on their property. “When we moved here in 2003, we knew this was a special place. Mell and I reflected on the footprint we wanted to leave on the land, and wanted to balance agriculture

“Because bears travel widely, it is critical that agricultural properties and communities work together to manage bear attractants.”

Resources

BEARS:

Consult www.bearawarebc.ca for methods to discourage problem bears, including easy instructions for constructing a simple predator electric fence. Electric fencing solutions are also shown at www.powerfence.ca.

BATS:

To learn more about bats and building bat houses visit Bat Conservation International’s web site at www.batcon.org.

TICKS:

The Ministry of Agriculture has safety information on ticks at www.agf.gov.bc.ca. A brochure on ticks and spiders is available on the OSCA web site www.osca.org. Check out OSCA’s web pages “Living with Wildlife” for pamphlets on bats, bears, snakes and other wildlife management topics. Many of the pamphlets have been produced in several languages for field crews who do not speak English. The guides have been produced with support from Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the Habitat Stewardship Program.



Top: Double-sided bat houses give bats a choice of temperature. Credit: Michelle Tiernen. Above: Apple bin beehive protectors made of old apple bins, chain link fencing and carabiner-style clips. Credit: Kevin Dunn

with the environment,” said Ken Thibault. “To invite bats to stay, we found out they needed a roost or bat house.”

The Thibaults worked with their neighbours including Joe Hilario from Lighthouse Orchards, and Aaron Reid a bat expert with Ministry of Environment, to design and built two bat houses. The houses sit on a tall steel pole, one facing north and one facing south, so the bats have a choice of temperature conditions. The bat houses could support a maternal colony of several hundred bats. Nobody has shinnied up the pole to look inside but the white-wash under the bat house shows that bats have definitely moved in.

Ticks

As soon as the weather warms up in February it’s “tick time.” Here in British Columbia there are three species of ticks that sometimes bite humans. Luckily there is little danger of disease transmission provided ticks are removed promptly. The Rocky Mountain wood tick, *Dermacentor andersoni*, lives the dry interior whereas the Western Black-legged Tick, *Ixodes pacificus*,

occurs on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. The Rocky Mountain tick in rare cases causes paralysis; and the Black-legged tick can be a carrier of the microorganism that causes Lyme disease.

Ticks are found in areas frequented by wildlife hosts such as deer and mice. Once a tick is on your clothes it tries to find a place to hide and feed. The head, armpits and groin are common areas where ticks will attach. It is a good idea to perform a tick check after every day spent outside near natural areas.

Check your clothes and perform an all-over “tick check” before bed, including your head. Be aware that ticks can live for months in clothes and blankets. They can survive washing but not the heat of a clothes dryer. Some insecticides can be effective but tucking in pant legs and doing a thorough check is preferred.

Margaret Holm works for Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance on wildlife management and species at risk outreach. Check out OSCA’s web site at www.osca.org.

Building a Farm

One Soil Block at a Time



By Moss Dance

Like many growers, I try to reduce my use of plastic on the farm, so I decided to grow most of my vegetable and flower starts in soil blocks. Soil blocks – also known as potting blocks – are compressed cubes of soil with a perfect balance of nutrients for seedlings.

I use soil blocks for most of my vegetable starts at my small-scale farm, which is just over an acre. My main soil blocker is a 12-blocker that produces about 500 two-inch blocks in half an hour.

Benefits of soil blocking

Soil blocks work well for a small-scale mixed vegetable farm because of space-saving advantages. I use a 1/2" mini blocker to germinate tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and basil on heat mats. I have a very limited indoor start system with only four light shelves and one 2" by 4" heat mat. With the mini-blocks, I can germinate the tomatoes and peppers quickly and free up the heat mat for more starts.

Potting up with soil blocks is really easy. Larger blockers have nifty plug inserts you can pop on that are the size of the smaller block. For example, I pot from 1/2" mini blocks right into 2" blocks. It's like Lego! About 3 weeks later, I pot them up again to 4" blocks.

Another benefit to soil blocks is that plants do not become root-bound so quickly. My theory is that root growth in the compressed soil of the block is a bit slower. Arzeena Hamir at Amara Farm says her brassicas tend to bolt less from root-binding in soil blocks because the roots can spread a little into neighbouring blocks.

Flats

I've been pleased to find that transplanting is a much easier task with the blocks. My 2" blocks are placed on large wooden flats that I constructed from 1x3' lumber (see image) The flats have open sides, so it's simple to pop the blocks out and get them in the ground.

This year, my 4" soil blocks lived on 1x4' wood planks, about 4' long. Each plank held about 10 blocks. The cedar planks were then neatly lined up on potting benches.

The multi-plant method

I used Elliot Coleman's multi-plant method from *The New Organic Grower* for several crops this year. This method reduces transplanting work and uses potting bench space more efficiently.

I multi-planted leeks, onions, scallions, beets and baby turnips. The scallions were very successful. Planted at 12 seeds per 2" block it was easy to transplant and harvest. I could pull up a bunch, wrap it with an elastic band and it was ready to wash and pack!

Soil blocking mixes

I look to Elliot Coleman again for his soil block recipe in *The New Organic Grower*. There are also multiple soil block mix recipes available at the PottingBlocks.com website (see sidebar.)

I substitute 1/2 cup wild fishmeal plus 1/2 cup kelp meal for alfalfa, cottonseed or blood meal when called for. Worm castings are also a great addition.

I make my mix in a bathtub on the ground with a flat shovel. A well-watered mix makes perfect blocks that hold together nicely. It's important to spend some time playing with mix consistencies to really get a handle on moisture content.

With one growing season behind me, I'm still learning. I'll be taking notes this growing season and sharing more with you next winter! 🌱

Moss Dance lives in Merville, BC and runs a CSA Program at Ripple Farm. This year, Moss is working with Arzeena Hamir at Amara Farm to start Merville Organics – a box program inspired by Saanich Organics. Visit Ripple Farm's website: www.ripplefarm.ca

“Soil blocks work really well for a small-scale mixed vegetable farm because of space-saving advantages.”

Getting started: supplies

To have an effective soil-blocking system that will work well at the height of plant starting season, you'll need:

- Two large tubs (old bathtubs work well here) to mix batches of soil blocking mix
- A small tub for mini-block mix
- Potting table
- Potting benches
- Wooden flats (see image of simple design)
- Flat-blade shovel
- Blocking mix ingredients
- Your chosen selection of soil blockers

Soil blockers are sold through Johnny's Selected Seeds, at Dig This in Victoria and Nanaimo and online at: www.pottingblocks.com.

Soil blocking tips

- Include the organic base fertilizer mix in every batch and mix well.
- Use perlite wherever possible. Soil blocks are compressed potting soil and perlite provides better airflow than compressed sand.
- Sift your compost: larger chunks of wood and rocks interrupt root growth.
- Use wooden flats.
- Water at least once per day in warm weather, monitor humidity and water when needed in cooler weather.
- When transplanting into the field, ensure that blocks are covered with soil.

For more info...

Check out recipes, tips, videos and ideas at www.pottingblocks.com

You can also geek out in the greenhouse this spring – listen to The Ruminant podcast interview with Jason Beam by Jordan Marr at:

www.theruminant.ca



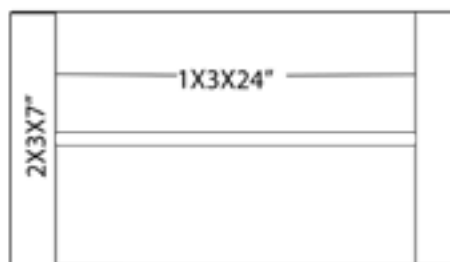
To Don't: What Not To Do

I made a big mistake when one of my soil-block mix batches didn't receive the right amount of base fertilizer mix. A few weeks later, I noticed that about 75 of my tomato starts were yellow, scrawny and ready for the compost pile (like the plant pictured above on the right.)

The plant on the left received the correct amount of base fertilizer and is much more healthy.

Credit: Moss Dance

Simple potting block flat design:



Measurements are approximate!



The 2013 COABC Conference

Prestige Hotel Vernon, BC - February 22 to 24, 2013

COABC's Conference provides educational and networking opportunities for new and established farmers and the general public.

To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of COABC, this year's theme is "Organics: Past, Present, and Future." We are seeking presenters who can represent the state of the organic sector today, share innovations and describe future directions. We welcome your submissions for presentations and encourage innovative approaches such as open space sessions, interactive panel presentations or show-and-tell. We are looking for photos from past events to be included in a celebratory slide presentation, especially conference pictures from 2002-2008. Please send photos to office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

Keynote Speaker – Lucy Sharratt Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN)

Lucy Sharratt has extensive experience as a researcher and campaigner with organizations concerned about genetic engineering and global justice issues. She has been involved in many high-profile campaigns that challenge genetic engineering, including Ban Terminator and Bovine Growth Hormone. Lucy was nominated for "Best Peoples Defense" in the Captain Hook Awards and continues to publish and organize grassroots movements with CBAN – challenging corporate control of food and genetic engineering.

Other Conference Highlights (subject to change)

- Friday evening wine and cheese reception

- Trade Show and Poster Presentations: a marketplace of products and ideas to challenge your imagination
- Practical and interactive workshops all day Saturday and Sunday morning
- COABC AGM Sunday

Accommodation

The Prestige Hotel Vernon is holding a block of rooms for COABC Conference participants for \$99.95 per night if booked by January 23, 2013. Book your room at: <http://prestigeinn.com> or call 250-558-5991.

Silent Auction

Every year our community donates an amazing range of items to be auctioned – if you would like to donate an auction item, please bring it with you to the conference!

Special Needs

If you have dietary, child care or other requirements, please contact the conference organizers at conference@certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

Trade Show

We welcome suppliers of approved inputs, seeds, appropriate technology, marketing tools, resource materials and more! Please book your Trade Show tables online at <http://coabc2013.eventbrite.ca/>.

Poster Sessions

We are pleased to, once again, offer free space for

Continued on page 18...

Special Thanks

to our 2013 Sponsors!



... Continued from page 16

poster presentations related to innovative organic production. Contact the conference organizers with your poster idea to book space.

Presentations & Workshops

Free Choice Whole Grain Feeding on Laying Hens, *Jacob Slosberg, UBC Farm*

AgriStability Program, The AgriStability program protects producers against declines in their net farming income.

Straight Lines, Curvy Landscape: Applying Keyline and Permaculture Design Strategies to Small Scale Organic Production, *Jesse Lemieux Bsc. PDC, Principal, Lead Teacher, Pacific Permaculture*

Biodynamic Practices at Alderlea Farm, *John & Katy Erlich, Alderlea Farm*

Organic Farmers of the Future: Feedback Session on Organic Farming Education in Elementary Schools, *Jeanette Sheehy & Johanna McBurnie, LifeCycles Project Society*

Organic Edamame: Potential Crop for Climate Adaptation in BC, *Krishna Sharma, professional plant breeder and Sharing Farm Volunteer*

Organic Farming for the 21st century: What is our message, how is it delivered and to whom? *Kate Petrusa, Glen Valley Organic Farm*

Young Agrarians, Learn about growing the youth agrarian ecological/organic/self-sustaining farm movement in BC, *Sara Dent, Farm-Folk/CityFolk*

Farm Succession Planning: Opportunities and Challenges

Targeted Grazing for Weed Management: A New IPM Technique for the Toolbox, *Jo-Ann Fox, BNRS, PAg., Program Manager, Southern Interior Weed Management Committee*

Organic Land Care: The Who What Where When and How, *Rochelle Eisen, Resilient Solutions Consulting*

Farm to School BC: Putting Healthy, Local and Sustainable Foods onto Students' Plates, *Brenda Kent, Farm to School*

Software Products for Small-Scale Farms, *Chris Bodnar, Glen Valley Organic Farm*

Produced in the Comox Valley Logo: A Local & Organic Story

Living and Sharing the Ecstasy of "Lunatic" Farming, *Garry and Wendy Lowe, MBA, B.Sc, BScN, RN, Independent Teacher.*

Need Organic Funds? How to Get the OSDP to Say YES! *Organic Sector Development Program (OSDP) committee members*

Training the Next Generation of Organic Farmers: Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Piece of the Larger Puzzle, *Anna Rallings, Research Associate and Farm School Coordinator, Karen Hawbolt, Organic Farmer, Sharing Farm Staff*

Potentials of Small Lot, Direct Market Ecological Agriculture on Underutilized ALR Land in Surrey, BC, *Caitlin Dorward, Research Associate, Kwantlen Polytechnic University*

Life Place Focused Small Scale, Human Intensive Food Systems: Modeling and Implementation Planning, *Dr. Kent Mullinix, Kwantlen Polytechnic University*



BC Seeds Room

Back by popular demand!

BC Seeds is a project of Farm-FolkCityFolk. We support organic farmers to increase the quantity and quality of locally grown seed by nurturing and networking community collectives. The BC Seeds Room will be open on Friday evening for exchanges and hands on opportunities covering all aspects of seed growing in BC. Bring along any dried seeds that need cleaning and seeds to trade and the stories that enhance their meaning. Come on in for informal mentoring and participatory cleaning, packaging, and/or exchanging of seeds. Mojave Kaplan of Planting Seeds will demonstrate a variety of cleaning tips and tools as well as a workshop on seed growing and ways to integrate seed production into the farm plan.

Mojave Kaplan, Susan Davidson, Sue Moore

Are We Going to Let GMOs Destroy our Industry / Movement? What is COABC's role in protecting organic agriculture? *Dag Falck, Organic Program Manager, Nature's Path Foods*

Summerhill Biodynamics, *Gabe Cipes, Summerhill Winery*

History of Farm Workers in the Okanagan, Past, Present and Future, *Doe Gregoire*

Small Scale Food Processor Association, *Candice Appleby, Executive Director SSFPA and Brian Millward, MBA and Social Media Marketing Specialist*



“ORGANICS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE”

BC Organic Conference & AGM

Prestige Hotel Vernon – Vernon, BC

February 22 – 24, 2013

REGISTRATION FORM

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Late registration subject to \$25 additional fee.

Name: _____ Farm Name: _____
Address: _____
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Email: _____ Phone: _____ Fax: _____
I am a member of (certifying body): _____

Please choose from these options:

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 - Saturday Conference & Feast:** Includes pass to the Saturday COABC workshops, tradeshow and Saturday Night Organic Feast, entertainment and Silent Auction **\$105**
 - Late Fee** (postmarked after January 31th) **\$25**
- TOTAL** \$ _____

_____ I would like to volunteer to assist during the conference.

I have the following dietary requirements: _____
The item I can donate to the auction is (describe): _____
The food I can donate for the meals is (describe): _____

Program Administrator:



**Please make your cheque payable to COABC and mail it and this form to:
COABC, 202-3002 32 Ave, Vernon, BC V1T 2L7**

Cancellation Policy: The COABC will refund registration fees less a 25% service fee only until February 18th. Cancellation requests must be made in writing to the Conference Coordinator to the address noted above. Refunds will not be provided after February 18th and refund payments will be prepared after the conference.

Reflections...

On a Popular Weekly Farm Newsletter



By Jordan Marr

As I look back on what was a busy and challenging second year of our farm's veggie business, one decision I think we got right was the four to five hours we set aside each week during the harvest season to produce a high-quality, entertaining, weekly email-newsletter. That's right – during the part of the season when there aren't enough hours in the week, I typically spend up to five of them producing our newsletter, which goes out to around 200 of our farmers' market and CSA customers.

I've got no regrets. Most weeks we have important information to communicate (or at the very least, the need to remind people that we've got veggies for sale), and by surrounding it with fun, readable content (which is what makes the newsletter so time-consuming to produce), we greatly increase the likelihood that our customers will actually open, read, enjoy, and anticipate our weekly farm update.

In an age of inbox-overload, I think an information-heavy, text-only newsletter is only going to entice a farm's most supportive and loyal customers. To get at the fickle ones, we've found that the entertaining bits we include do a lot of heavy lifting for us. Not only do we have a respectable open-rate (75% for our veggie box subscribers; 50% for our general list), but our emails tend to get forwarded on to subscribers' friends and family. Or, as we call them, potential new customers!

Below I highlight the elements of our newsletter that have made it successful. In general though, I want to stress the value (if not necessity) of learning how to use one of the two, free, online email-newsletter programs that predominate: MailChimp and Constant Contact. We use the former, but both provide very powerful tools for producing colourful, image- and video-laden newsletters in a jiffy. Without MailChimp it would be much more difficult to incorporate the suggestions highlighted below.

Learning how to use these programs is on par with learning to use Microsoft Word or Excel – there's a frustrating five to ten hour learning curve, but after that it's a cinch. And, unlike using your email program to produce the newsletter, these programs allow you to keep track of stats, like how many people opened the newsletter, or clicked on a specific link within. Creepy, but useful.

Our newsletters usually include the following: an interesting header photo, a farm update, a recipe, a humorous, short essay, and a thoughtful quotation. The update usually explains the header photo, tells a funny anecdote of the past week, and communicates market info.

Suggestion #1: Include new interesting or funny photos each week.

In an age of ever-shrinking attention spans, images will generally be more popular than big blocks of text. The first thing our readers see is a large header photo

“You don’t need to spend five hours a week on your newsletter. But putting in ... an extra hour in order to gather and insert some images or videos will very likely increase your readership and, hopefully, your sales.”

with our farm’s logo affixed; our version of the cover of the Rolling Stone. We try to make it a bit puzzling because it encourages readers to read on to get an explanation of the photo. When we don’t have time to be elaborate, we fall back on a scenic farm shot. If your newsletter is otherwise text-based, this is an efficient way to increase your open-rate by a few points.

Suggestion #2: Include a short essay – funny is good.

In truth, our nearly-weekly essay is why it takes so long to produce our newsletter. I don’t consider it essential to yours, but I mention it here for the writerly types among you. Done well, it’s a great way to deepen customers’ understanding of organic farming, food politics, etc. I always try to make my essays funny, and have received lots of compliments. I also discovered that the local paper was interested in publishing them, which meant we got a free form of advertising for work I was already doing. You can read a couple of examples at thomesteadfarm.ca/essays.

Suggestion #3: Embed or link to videos.


People love videos. It’s as simple as that, and using them is as simple as linking to something relevant on YouTube. Even better is if you can embed the video right in your newsletter, or have an image of the video link to your website or YouTube. Got a lot of home gardeners among your customers? In June, link to a video on how to prune tomato plants. Or just be silly. In one of my essays I referenced the gameshow “Wheel of Fortune” and below it I embedded a video of Vanna White’s first appearance on the show.

Suggestion #4: Link to your website. A lot.

Every time someone clicks a link to your website, it helps your site do better on search engine rankings. You’ve gone to the trouble of producing newsletter content people actually want to read; now, capitalize on that by... [READ MORE](#)

Just kidding. Capitalize on that by making them follow a link to your website to see a YouTube video you’ve embedded there or read the second half of your essay or recipe. This is an especially useful strategy for anyone producing an all-text newsletter in a regular email program, because including only half the content in

your email will reduce how long and, well, boring it appears.

You don’t need to spend five hours a week on your newsletter. But putting in, say, an extra hour in order to gather and insert some images or videos will very likely increase your readership, and hopefully, your sales. Want to get into more detail on this topic? I don’t mind phone calls. Or, if you have an internet connection, start a thread on the COABC’s listserv. 

Jordan Marr grows veggies in Peachland. His first e-book, a compilation of his short essays on farming, can be found on kindle.com by searching his name.



Farm numbers dip, but organic farms up: Statistics Canada

According to the Report on Agriculture, released by Statistics Canada in May 2012, the number of certified organic operations has continued to grow across Canada. Organic farms numbered 3,713 in 2011, which was 1.8 percent of Canadian farm operations overall. This is up from 1.5 percent in 2006 and 0.9 percent in 2001.

Growth in organic operations has slowed, with an increase of four percent from 2006 to 2011. The increase in the previous five-year period was 67 percent. But even meagre growth in organic farm numbers is impressive when you consider the overall trend in agriculture.

Statistics Canada recorded a decline from 2006 to 2011 in total farm numbers that was consistent across all provinces, and a decline in every new census since 1941.

Planting Seeds for an Organic Seed Movement



Clockwise from left: Exploring seeds in the interactive seed cleaning room, Dan Jason sharing seed stories. Credit: Sara Dent. Mojave Kaplan and Martin Faucher with their winnower. Credit: Don Tipping

A review of the 2012 Seed Gathering

By Heather Pritchard

From November 9-11, 2012, FarmFolk CityFolk, in partnership with Kwantlen Polytechnic University, brought together 130 provincial seed growers, farmers, students and community seed activists from all across BC for two days of learning, sharing, seed cleaning and strategizing.

The weekend started with Susan Walsh, USC Canada, announcing that USC, in partnership with Seeds of Diversity, has received four years of funding from the W. Garfield Weston Foundation. This initiative – the Bauta Family Initiative on Seed Security “will promote local and diverse seed countrywide, building a more secure and diverse ‘made-in-Canada’ seed supply.”

USC has divided Canada into five regions: BC, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, and will hire coordinators in each of the regions. In BC, the position will be housed with FarmFolk CityFolk.

One of the outcomes of the weekend was that several seed growers “workshopped” the formation of a seed producer’s cooperative and signed up to form a coop organizing committee. The new cooperative received generous guidance from Don Tipping of Siskiyou Seeds and the Family Farmers Seed Cooperative. To date, 16 producers have indicated interest in the cooperative and a Vancity representative, who attended the workshop, has agreed to fund FarmFolk CityFolk and the BC Cooperative Association to conduct a feasibility study.

A popular area open throughout the weekend was the Seed Cleaning Room, organized by Mojave Kaplan (Planting Seeds Project), Susan Davidson (Glorious Organics Cooperative) and Sue Moore (Notch Hill Farm). People dropped into the room to clean seed clean and test a variety of seed cleaning equipment. These three growers first set up a seed cleaning room at the 2012 COABC Conference AGM, and, by popular demand, will be bringing it to Vernon for the 2013 Conference and AGM.

Certainly a highlight of the weekend was the fabulous food donated by local and organic BC producers. Slow Food volunteers sourced the food, NOW BC warehoused it and Glorious Organics Cooperative transported it to the event. The generous food donations allowed us to keep the costs down and with sponsorship from Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary and West Coast Seeds, small grants from USC Canada and Vancity, and subsidies from Kwantlen and Young Agrarians, allowed us to subsidize more than half the people to attend.

Feedback from participants suggests that people want to know about how they can grow more seed and produce better quality seed. The group

recommended that we could conduct day-long on-farm workshops on specific seeds, support the growth of seed libraries, piggyback activities onto Seedy Saturdays, and continue to network seed growers across BC.

We premiered the first in the video series *Seed Works* — how to grow, harvest and clean seeds — produced by FarmFolk CityFolk with generous funding from Vancity. When the two organic seed growers featured in the video (Patrick Steiner and David Catzel) were asked to stand up and be recognized, they were both holding a sleeping child in their arms — positive signs for the future of seeds.

The Gathering presentations were videotaped and are available for viewing online. Go to YouTube and search under FarmFolk CityFolk's Channel. 🌱

 [youtube.com/user/FFCFtech](https://www.youtube.com/user/FFCFtech)

Heather Pritchard is the Farm Program Manager for FarmFolk CityFolk and an organic farmer with Glorious Organics Cooperative.

Make Sure Your Voice is Heard!



Organic Certification

Exploring issues, challenges, and options for B.C. producers

Come hear the preliminary findings of the COABC's Small-Scale Certification Research Project being presented at the COABC Annual Conference Feb 22-24, 2013 in Vernon. The research team has been busy investigating and seeking solutions to the issues and challenges deterring non-certified organic producers from participating in organic certification programs. The conference session will be a great opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. Check out the project update on page 26.

For more information, please contact the research team:

Andrea Lawseth at 250-205-0279 or info@aelagroconsulting.com
Rochelle Eisen at 250-502-0323 or rare@telus.net
Gunta Vitins at 778-772-5996 or gunta.vitins@gmail.com
Brenda Frick at 306-260-0663 or organic@usask.ca

Funding for this project has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program. In British Columbia, this program is delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.

Farm Animals

Updating Canada's Codes of Practice

By Caroline Ramsay

Many organic farmers are aware of Codes of Practice but may be less familiar with Canada's renewed Code development process or how the Codes apply to them as organic producers raising livestock and poultry. This article builds on a presentation Jackie Wepruk (General Manager, National Farm Animal Care Council) gave at the 2012 COABC conference.

About the National Farm Animal Care Council

The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) coordinates a national approach to advance farm animal care and welfare in Canada. Through an inclusive approach, involving the entire value chain, NFACC works to build processes that facilitate Canada's agriculture industries in addressing farm animal care.

NFACC brings together diverse stakeholders to:

- Develop Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals,



Credit: Helmut Lang

- Create a process for the development of animal care assessment programs,
- Provide a forum for open dialogue on farm animal welfare.

Canada's Code Development Process

Codes of Practice serve as our national understanding of farm animal care requirements and

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“Codes of Practice serve as our national understanding of farm animal care requirements and recommended practices.”

recommended practices. The Codes are scientifically informed, practical, and reflect societal expectations for farm animal care. They include recommendations and requirements for housing, feed and water, transportation, and other animal husbandry practices.

NFACC fulfills a vital role by providing oversight that the Code development process is consistently followed and by facilitating multi-stakeholder discussions for each Code. Organic farmers familiar with the development of organic standards will not be surprised to hear that the Code discussions are complex and that it takes at least two years to complete a Code! There are seven steps in the Code development process (see chart below for more details.)

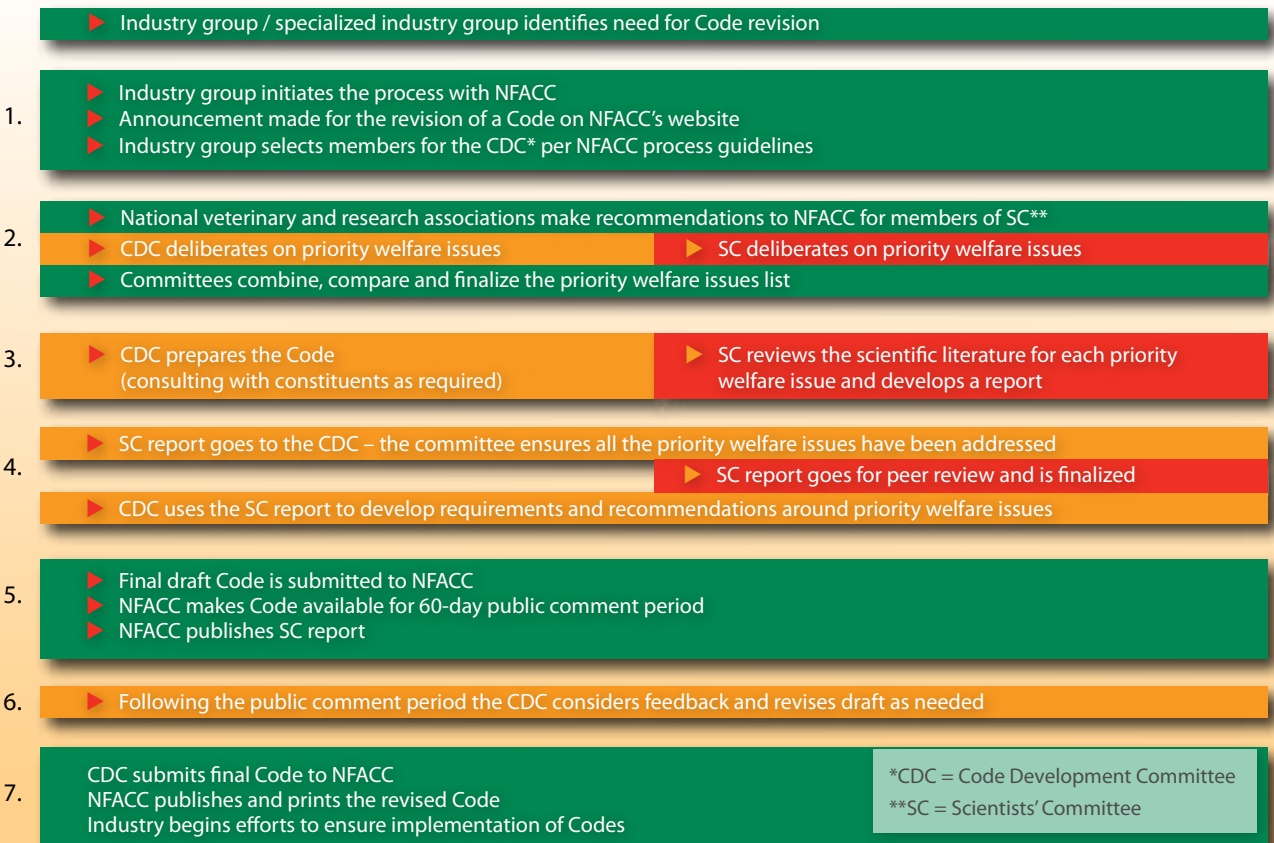
Each Code being developed includes the following committees, members for which are selected in accordance with NFACC’s Code development process:

- A Code Development Committee – Members are responsible for the development of the Code. Members include producers, transporters, veterinarians, animal welfare representatives, regulatory enforcement representatives, processors, governments, researchers and technical expertise.
- A Scientists’ Committee – Members review and develop a report that synthesizes the results of research relating to select priority welfare issues. Committee members are researchers with expertise in the farm animal under consideration. The Code Development Committee uses the report in drafting the Code.

Continued on page 28..

NFACC Code Development Process

The development of new Codes and Code revisions follow specific steps that are designed to make the process transparent, collaborative, science and consensus-based, and participative.



*CDC = Code Development Committee
**SC = Scientists’ Committee

Organic certification

Update on the Small-Scale Certification Research Project


By Andrea Lawseth, Rochelle Eisen, Gunta Vitins and Brenda Frick

Work continues on the Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) research project that is investigating and seeking solutions to the issues and challenges deterring non-certified organic producers from participating in organic certification programs. We, the consultants hired by COABC, are more than halfway through the information gathering process. We've consulted with a broad range of producers, including urban farmers, to uncover the barriers to certification, find innovative ways to minimize those barriers, and explore solutions to suit the needs of all organic producers, including alternative certification models.

We've held group stakeholder meetings and workshops, completed a significant number of one-on-one interviews and are busy collating data from the online survey accessible from the COABC website. The online survey will close on December 20, so individuals who haven't had a chance to provide input yet are urged to complete the survey before the deadline by clicking on the links at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

Preliminary findings will be presented by the consultants at the Pacific Agriculture Show in January, the COABC Annual Conference in February 2013, and will appear in the Spring Issue of the BC Organic Grower. The project report will be completed by April 30, 2013. The COABC will consider the report findings to help determine if more inclusive certification programs suitable for all organic producers, including small scale operators should be developed.

For more information on the research project and consultation process, please contact the research team:

Andrea Lawseth at 250-205-0279 or info@aelagroconsulting.com, Rochelle Eisen at 250-502-0323 or rare@telus.net; Gunta Vitins at 778-772-5996 or gunta.vitins@gmail.com; Brenda Frick at 306-260-0663 or organic@usask.ca 

Funding for this project has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program. In British Columbia, this program is delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.

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Organics

Celebrating 20 years! 1993-2013

From Suits to Dirty Boots: How I Became a Farmer

By Gary Davis



While doing the 2001 Census my burn to grow vegetables became clear – dirty shoe clear. My father’s job required our family to move almost every year, so I had no roots. Having a garden in those early years was not in the

picture. My interest in growing plants appeared at various times in my teen years; whenever I saw one of my Mom’s house plants needing water, I would attend to it. She often said “Gary, you should be a farmer,” but she didn’t show me how.

In elementary school I remember using the top of a carrot, putting it in a plate with water and watching it sprout. I was devastated when it died. I wanted to take it to the next level but I didn’t know how.

A real opportunity to have a garden arrived in 1973, when I moved into my first house in Fort Langley. The soil looked really good to me as there were no stones or rocks. It was former farmland. I decided to grow something! I removed a two-foot round sod area and, using rabbit manure provided by my children’s rabbits, I planted some sugar pumpkin seed. That first effort resulted in 32 sugar pumpkins. Just what was I to do with 32 sugar pumpkins?

Many years later, while working for the 2001 Census, I completed my assigned route. There were certain areas where the first census takers could find no one home and late in the census process they assigned the “Clean Up Crew,” a group who would finish the census by making contact with the unfound residents. I was in my late 50’s, in that group, and determined to do the job right.

I visited a farm on Bradner Road, Abbotsford, at least three times but could never find anyone at the house. It was July... what do farmers do in July?

One day I saw a living person! I introduced myself and told her why I was there. And I asked a pointed question: “Does ANYONE REALLY live here, duh?” I was a little frustrated.

“Well, yes,” was the response. “Brenda lives here. John lives over there. Alyson lives there and Allan lives up stairs in the house.” All these people live here and I could never ever find one – just one!

“And where do you live?” I asked. “I don’t live here. I am Allan’s daughter. I live in Vancouver.” It took someone from a faraway city to point me in the right direction. Well, I’ll be!

“John, is probably down in the field.”

As I bumped and bounced along a farm road I noticed the long rows of produce as green as can be. I was in awe. Then a green tractor appeared just off the bumpy road. It was stationary and as I got closer I saw a man on his hands and knees wearing a blackish hat, coveralls, and hand-picking potatoes. There I am dressed for my census job, but I had an overwhelming desire to throw all the paperwork away, run across that field, getting dirt in my shoes and dirtying my freshly ironed pants, to help with harvesting. It was a strong desire but I knew I had to get my current job completed. I will come back later.

After the census was completed I visited that farm on a regular basis. It was nice to finally connect with farmers and were willing to share information I needed.

One day, these farmers had freshly harvested garlic sitting in bins. I was fascinated by their numbers. To connect with my newly found friends, I offered, “I grow garlic also.” The response was not what I expected but it was appropriate. It wasn’t a pat on the back for doing such a thing. Nope. It was a question: “What kind of garlic do you grow? Softneck or hardneck?”

My response? “I grow the garlic that you put in the ground in the fall, the little clove ones, and they come up in the spring.” I had much to learn.

The guy on his knees, harvesting the potatoes, was John Switzer of Glen Valley Organic Farm (GVOF) in Abbotsford, BC. Working that farm at that time were John, Alyson, Brenda and Allan. It was a wonderful discovery for me. Those in this group were the farmers who put Glen Valley Organic Farm on its feet.

And that is where I started. 

Gary Davis became an urban farmer in Fort Langley after growing so much produce it became impossible to process or eat. He sells from a farm gate – his garage door.

A key component of the Code process is the public comment period. This consultation stage allows all stakeholders who share an interest in responsible farm animal care, including organic producers, to provide input into the final Code.

How do Codes Apply to Organic Producers?

1. The Animal Welfare Task Force of the Expert Committee on Organic Agriculture (ECO) reviewed the organic standards in 2009 and developed additional guidance for optimal welfare of several animal types. The guidance pieces reference the relevant species Codes as standards that should be followed, unless the organic standard is more prescriptive or the code conflicts with the intent of the standard. For more information, see www.organicagcentre.ca/animalwelfare/aw_task_force.asp.

2. Codes serve as educational tools, reference materials for animal welfare regulations, and are the foundation for animal care assessment programs. Some organic farmers may have been assessed to a commodity animal care assessment program that was based on a Code of Practice.

3. In terms of animal welfare regulations, some provinces directly reference the Codes within their animal welfare legislation, and all provinces utilize the Codes as guides for what is acceptable or unacceptable. So whether for conventional or organic agriculture, the Codes are a recognized guidance document for enforcement activities. In this way, the Codes help ensure that all users of the Codes have a common understanding of expectations relative to animal care.


Codes of Practice Currently under Review

Below is an update on the eight Codes currently under revision. Visit NFACC's website (www.nfacc.ca) regularly, or watch for the press release announcing the public comment period for a Code that you'd like to provide input on.

- Beef Cattle – The Scientists' Committee (SC) report has been peer reviewed and fi-

nalized. The Code Development Committee (CDC), utilizing the SC report, continues to work on the Code.

- Equine – The SC report has been peer reviewed and finalized. The public comment period is scheduled for December 3, 2012 to February 14, 2013.
- Farmed Fox – The draft Code underwent its public comment period. The next step is for the CDC to review the comments and make any changes to the Code. The SC report is available on NFACC's website.
- Mink – The draft Code underwent its public comment period. The next step is for the CDC to review the comments and make any changes to the Code. The SC report is available on NFACC's website.
- Pigs – The SC report has been peer reviewed and finalized. The CDC, utilizing the SC report, continues to work on the revised Code. The SC report is available on NFACC's website.
- Poultry (Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders) – The SC report is being finalized for peer review. Members of the CDC are being identified.
- Poultry (Layers) – Work continues on the SC report.
- Sheep – The SC report is under peer review. The CDC, utilizing the SC report, continues to work on the Code.

Funding for the Codes of Practice is provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agricultural Flexibility Fund (Addressing Domestic and International Market Expectations Relative to Farm Animal Welfare, as part of Canada's Economic Action Plan). 

 www.nfacc.ca

Caroline Ramsay is on contract with NFACC as Code Development Secretary for the equine Code of Practice. She studied agriculture at UBC and has worked on organic farms in Ontario and Alberta.

People Points

Employee Battles

Start with “One Good Thing”

By Karen Fenske

Two employees descend on your office with their “hair standing on end” and flushed faces. You know that they aren’t getting along so you agree to listen to each story. You first listen to Frank who insists that Tanis is an “airhead” who damages the produce and spends the day chatting away doing nothing. Tanis is shaking her head saying that Frank is rude to customers, never smiles, takes too long to unload the truck and has muddy hands he never cleans.

In your head you may be thinking: “Are these adults really behaving like this this? “This is ridiculous, I should find new employees!” or “I have better things to do.” However, you patiently say, “This is a frustrating situation. Let’s talk about (explore) what’s really going on and work something out.”

First, you think through the truth. You hired Frank to pack the produce and load the truck and to take the truck to the market or store and unload it. He is prompt, has never missed a day of work, gets the job done efficiently and accurately, and takes extremely good care when handling the produce so as to not break even one leaf. One could say he is task oriented and pays attention to detail. He does what he was hired to do very well.

When you met Tanis you were impressed how friendly she was and how easily she could sell even the saddest looking apples, “It could be sauce, you know.” She is patient with customers, helps them find what they need and gives suggestions for storing and cooking their purchases, adding value to the sale. Customers know her by name and you have been told people continue to buy from your company because she adds a “ray of sunshine” to their day. One could say she is a people person, who looks at the bigger picture and can influence others. She was hired to work with people and sell. Tanis does what she was hired to do very well.

Now that you remember the good things about your employees share these facts with them together. Then ask Frank if he wants to spend his day helping customers with a smiling face and sharing cooking

ideas. Does Tanis want to spend her day in the back packing and unpacking not talking to anyone? What is the one thing that Tanis does that Frank doesn’t want to do? What is one thing that Tanis sees Frank do that he does well?

The bottom line is that the job requires both of them. Tanis chatting with customers encourages repeat business, which benefits everyone. The produce is easy to sell because it always looks good due the care Frank takes while loading and unloading.

To encourage each person to find “one good thing” (one strength) about the other is the first step to mutual respect. Inspiring everyone to see the need for each other leads to good team work. Because you infused the situation with your patience you all contributed to the success of your enterprise. This recipe is safe to try at home; you will be pleasantly surprised. 🌿

Karen Fenske, is the principal of StratPoint Solutions, www.stratpoint.ca.



In business since 1999, Discovery Organics is an independently owned Canadian distributor of certified organic produce. We serve hundreds of customers, including rural buying groups, natural foods retailers, and wholesalers across Western Canada.

discoveryorganics.ca

Events & Announcements

A BC HACCP Plan Workshop, January 10, 2013, Comfort Inn, 8255 - 166th St, Surrey. This food safety planning workshop may be of interest to farms and other businesses considering, or already involved in, food processing. The workshop is a valuable education tool for owners and employees. HACCP planning workshops are an opportunity to network and to access information that will help enhance your bottom line in these changing economic times. Information about the workshops and on-line registration is available at www.ssfpa.net/foodsafety

Pacific Ag Show, January 24-26, 2013, Tradex, Abbotsford, BC. COABC will once again have a booth at the Pacific Ag Show. The Ag show

will showcase the latest and most innovative equipment and technology for the agriculture industry with over 250 dealers and manufacturers present. For more information on the show visit www.agricultureshow.net or, for the short course listings, visit: www.agricultureshow.net/horticulture-growers-short-course

2013 Seedy Saturdays are listed at: www.seeds.ca

Saturday January 26, 2013
Denman Island, BC

Saturday February 2, 2013
Qualicum Beach, BC

Saturday February 9, 2013
Ladner, BC

Saturday February 16, 2013
Victoria, BC

CLASSIFIEDS

Place your event or classified ad in the BC Organic Grower

Events are free and classifieds are only \$25/issue!

For more information, contact Moss at:

bcogadvertising@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Saturday March 2, 2013
Courtenay, BC

North Vancouver, BC
Enderby, BC

Saturday March 9, 2013
Kelowna, BC

Saturday March 23, 2013
Duncan, BC
Port Alberni, BC

COABC invites you to
Certified Organic Associations of BC

Strengthen the organic sector with the Organic Sector Development Program (OSDP)

The OSDP has inspired the organic sector to become a haven for innovation through the many projects it has supported.

The OSDP supports industry-led initiatives that seize opportunities, respond to new and emerging issues, and pilot solutions in order to adapt and remain competitive.

COABC is pleased to announce the OSDP funding ratio has been modified to cover up to 70% of project costs.

Upcoming deadlines: January 18, April 12 & June 7, 2013

Note: all projects must be complete by December 12, 2013

For more information, please contact us online at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca or call 250 838-0965



Funding for the OSDP has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) and delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.



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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		
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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, XL or XXL *	\$5.00	\$5.00	HST taxable		
Organic Tree Fruit Management	\$19.95	\$25.95	HST exempt (5% GST)		
				Sub-total (before taxes and shipping):	

*Limited quantities available - please contact the COABC office for availability

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Please do not send payment before receiving invoice.

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