

British Columbia

Organic Grower



In this issue:

Targeted Grazing for Weed Control, Permaculture & Biodynamics, Amphibians on the Farm, Organic Value Chain Roundtable and CSA Farming

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BC Organic Grower

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Permaculture & Biodynamics

Summerhill Pyramid Winery puts theory into action.

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Note from the Executive

By Rebecca Kneen

Pruning, lambing, the first knuckles of rhubarb poking through the leaves, the last dirty dregs of snow quietly disappearing day by day – spring always brings a lovely combination of excitement and increased work. Which trees were winter-killed or broken during this winter's heavy snows? How much fenceline has to be replaced before the stock can get on new grass? Did the mice eat through every roll of reemay in the barn?



As an organization, COABC faces many of the same questions. OK, not quite the same, but it seems like every spring brings the excitement of new faces around the Board of Director's table combined with the need to ensure that our lofty strategic plan comes to fruition.

Over the last few years, change has been our rallying cry. We've worked on changing to the National Standard, on increasing standards enforcement in the province, fighting off farmed salmon, resisting GMOs and adapting to major regulatory changes which govern organics and agriculture all over the province.

It has become apparent to the Board of the COABC that we are – and always have been – much more than an accreditation body. We are the voice of organics in BC. We have received, over the last several, years a resounding mandate to stand up and yell, stomp, shake signs and even shake the earth to represent organics. So that's what we intend to do.

Our rather ambitious Strategic Plan for the next five years includes very practical objectives like GMO labelling regulation and funding for extension agents. It also includes broader policy objectives, such as progressive water policy and protection of agricultural land, increased access to farmland, and better use of local organic foods in institutions across the province.

And it includes innovation in certification: finding ways for small farms to be included in certification programmes without compromising our standards.

Our goal, in fact, is to strengthen our standards, our community and public understanding of organics by including more farmers in certification programmes. In addition, we are finding new ways to partner with Certification Bodies who are not accredited with the COABC, so that we can better represent all the faces of organic food in the province. We are excited to be able to enact this plan, and we look forward to your input.

The new Board and Executive of the COABC are anticipating a great year of leading the charge. We even have a good idea of where we are going! And as for how we get there – well, start by using the checkmark logo on your retail packaging and signage wherever possible, and look for updates on our policy and on-the-ground initiatives.

Finally, let me say that I am proud and overwhelmed to be co-chair of the COABC this year, along with my stalwart buddy, Susan Snow (FVOPA) – our Executive of Arzeena Hamir (IOPA) & Fred Danenhowar, (PACS) round out our great team. May spring's anticipation bring great summer fruit for all our members. 🍏



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Administrator's Report

By Jen Gamble

This spring, the COABC will say a reluctant good bye to our long-standing Accreditation Director Anne Macey. After many years of involvement and 10 years of leading the Accreditation Board, Anne is retiring.



Anne has been a pillar of the organic sector for many years and is well respected internationally for her work with IOIA. BC was fortunate when Anne relocated here from Ontario and started working with the BC organic community.

Initially, Anne volunteered all her time and was instrumental in revamping the COABC accreditation program. She also did much advocacy work with the government to help fund the sector in its early years. The professionalism and integrity Anne brought to the organization set the bar high for all those who worked with her.

The BC organic community has benefited greatly from her dedication and her amazing ability to reconcile differing opinions. Solving numerous problems without creating alienation is a particular skill that Anne has brought to the COABC and the entire organic sector.

Anne has embraced the organic vision, kept the greater good in the forefront and inspired others to do the same. Her selflessness brings out the best in everyone.

Today, the BC organic sector is stronger because of Anne's hard work and commitment. Thank you Anne.

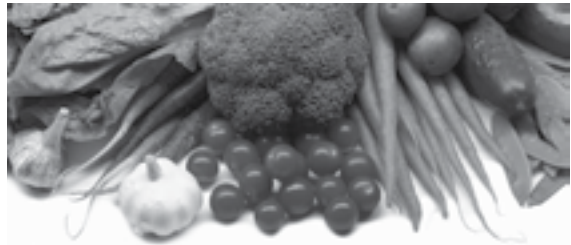


Paddy Doherty thanks Anne Macey at the COABC Conference in February, 2013.

Thank you to everyone who made the 20th anniversary conference "Organics: Past, Present, and Future" a great success. The conference, held in Vernon, was well attended with representatives from across the country. We look forward to seeing everyone again next year on Vancouver Island. 🍀

Last Quarter Achievements

- Hired Accreditation Director, Molly Thurston, starts May 1, 2013
- Attended the Pacific Agriculture Show
- Finalized 2012 year end financials
- COABC 2013 Conference held Feb 22-24, Vernon, BC



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.

Today, as it was 22 years ago, our mission remains the same: Promoting the growth and integrity of organics from field to table.



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Editor's Note

As I was putting this issue of the BC Organic Grower together, the song "Wind of Change" by the Scorpions started rolling through my head. It's certainly not my tendency to hum rock ballads, but the winds of spring (which are nothing to laugh at here on Southern Vancouver Islands) have been ushering in a new season.

This, paired with the content of this issue, and some changes on the road ahead had me whistling along to the Scorpions, mulling over some of the fascinating discussions we had at the 2013 conference in Vernon, around the future of organics, the growth of the sector, and how certification may be due for a makeover in BC.

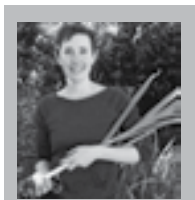
Where are organics going? There seem to be two certain responses to this question. First, the desire for organic products is growing – as Shauna MacKinnon from the Canadian Organic Trade Association tells us in this issue. The surprising (or is it?) statistic that 58 per cent of Canadians are purchasing organic foods weekly, a number that rises to 66 percent if you look at BC alone.

Secondly, I would have to say that the world of organics is shifting. This might not seem like much of a certainty when we don't know exactly where they are going. But what is certain is that the industry is going to have to be nimble, on its toes, and at the driver's seat rather than lagging behind the bus.

There continue to be so many battles on the horizon – the struggles against genetically engineered foods, the battle over the word "organic," and the need to communicate the why and how of certification, and perhaps changes to certification itself, in order to appeal to producers who may be already partially down the organic path.

As I sat with many of you to enjoy beautiful food in Vernon, I had no doubt that the sector is up for these challenges. I hope that the content of this issue can fuel the debates and help many of these important issues to move forward.

In closing, I wanted to let you all know that after nearly five years at the helm of this incredible publication,




Andrea Langlois,
editor



Moss Dance,
layout

I have announced my retirement from my role in order to give fuller attention to other projects in my life and to spend a bit more time in the garden, rather than on the computer. I will be back editing the Summer issue, but if you know of someone who may be interested in steering the BCOG into these exciting times, please visit the COABC website this spring for the posting.

As always, please feel free to be in touch with your ideas and words: editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca. 

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A Green Hearth

Learning to farm as a family



Left: Zaira and her chickens. Right: Popping corn. Credit: A Green Hearth

By Hannah Roessler

Shannon Cowan and Patrick Walshe now live in Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island on six acres of land, but in the past they have moved around – a lot. They love their growing farm, and along with their two daughters Zaira and Teegan, they relish its ever-evolving state.

“We moved about 10 times in the first 14 years we were together, always knowing that we wanted to farm but trying to find a good situation, and now we have this piece of land and we finally feel as if we’re where we want to be,” says Shannon.

They purchased the land 2 years ago, and have been steadily working to make it the farm they always dreamed of. After working and WWOOFing on various farms all over Canada, from vegetable operations to maple syrup producers, Shannon and Patrick decided to return to Vancouver Island and look for that perfect piece of land where they could build a healthy green home and get farming.

Shannon explains, “The draw to farming is not just the ethic of growing responsibly and taking care of the soil, but also the ability to give back to the community. And in the end, it’s just a very wholesome way to spend the day.”

Shannon has been dutifully blogging about their experiences, covering the trials and tribulations as well as the joys and excitement experienced while starting a

farm on a raw piece of land. A writer by profession, the blog posts are well-written and engaging, covering all sorts of useful tidbits.

“We’ve melded everything under the sun for this blog,” says Shannon with a laugh.

There are recipes (from sprouting to cheese-making), reviews of different vegetable varieties, and step-by-step explanations of the stages of building their green home – there is even information on how to access water on your land. They are in the process of applying for farm status and are hoping to be certified organic in a year – stay tuned for more blog posts on these upcoming adventures!

Shannon and Patrick decided to start the blog because they were having trouble finding the information they needed to accomplish what they wanted on their land. “So we thought it would be useful to share what we were learning along the way. Plus there is a blogging community out there where people are very supportive,” says Shannon, “And it’s also a creative outlet where I can share our experiences visually through photos as well as words.”

Future aspirations

“One of the biggest things for us is learning more about working in community – I certainly will be writing more about that,” says Shannon.

“Land is so expensive here, so we need to find ways to incorporate more people into farming.”

Shannon and Patrick are already expanding their household to include Shannon’s parents on the farm, and are looking forward to sharing farming opportunities with the larger community.

“We are especially keen to share farming with children. This is a really big thing for us. So they’re not saying, ‘Ewwwww, that carrot is dirty!’ but they just know that that is what it’s supposed to be like when it comes out of the ground. We want to get them when they’re young, so it sticks.”

Their eldest daughter Zaira already seems to be hooked – she has her own egg business where she buys the grain, cares for the chickens and sells the eggs, even supplying a local CSA in the summer. She also hired her excited 5-year old sister Teegan to feed the chickens compost for \$2 a week.


Looks like it’s going to stick.

 agreenheart.com

End of Blog Series

For the past few issues of the Organic Grower I’ve been searching out BC farming blogs to review. There are many farmers who find it challenging to find anytime to write a blog post in the midst of a busy season, and many wonder whether or not the blogs are even helping others. As Shannon Cowan said, “Sometimes it just feels like everything has already been done on the internet.”

While I certainly recognize the difficulties in keeping up a blog (I find it hard to do myself!) I still see them as valuable contributions. As we all know, there is so much to learn when it comes to farming, and sharing our local information can make our paths to success that much easier.

So keep blogging your stories and experiences, whether it’s about your best growing squash variety or the ways that you process your seed or the way that you obtained land – there are many people out there who want to hear about it! 

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 M.A. in Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria.



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Spencer Hill Orchard



Credit: Sheila Dobie

By Spring Gillard

Sheila Dobie is passionate about her local food system and she is a big part of its revitalization. Dobie and her partner Karl Lilgert moved to the Kettle Valley from the North Coast in 2006 with plans to start fresh. Dobie had gardened all her young adult life and had been part of a land co-operative in the Kootenays, so growing food and a connection to the land was in her blood.

They purchased an eight-acre farm just outside of Grand Forks. Primarily orchard, the farm was established by one of the area's original Doukhobor families. From the start, Dobie was committed to organic practices and is certified by the Boundary Organic Producers Association. She is also guided by permaculture principles – the idea of a closed-loop system where everything is produced on site and then fed back into the system to produce again.

“We look at the complete system,” says Dobie. “We mulch around the base of the trees to build the soil, and then see this beautiful response to the ground when mushrooms sprout from the wood debris.”

Three acres of the farm is orchard, with a mix of over 360 trees including apple, pear, cherry, plum, apricot and a few nectarine trees. The market garden takes up another acre. The crops vary from year to year, a mix of corn, beets, basil, squash, cilantro and pumpkins. They have the perfect growing conditions for heat-loving peppers, too. As with many regions in BC, deer can be a problem and a tall sturdy fence is required to keep them from eating all the profits.

“Deer don’t eat garlic though,” says Dobie happily, “so the top third of the garden isn’t fenced.” They rotate the garlic with cover crops, then harvest to produce their own mulch or till it in to prepare the ground, depending on the time of year.

The farm also has several outbuildings to store equipment, a barn that they use as a processing area and cold storage for all that fruit. There’s even an outdoor stage where they’ve held performances during their annual harvest festival (part of their commitment to BC Agritourism). Their big house is roomy enough for the WWOOFers (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) who help them out from time to time.

“We mulch around the base of the trees to build the soil, and then see.. mushrooms sprout from the wood debris.”

Sheila and Karl helped to start the Kettle Valley Food Co-op in Grand Forks; the co-op sells on-line to members, and local growers fill the orders.

“We’re both consumers and producers,” says Dobie. They also sell to the Kootenay Country Store Co-op and the Nelson Farmers Market a few hours away.


The couple has also been involved with the Grand Forks and Boundary Agricultural Society, the group responsible for the local seed bank project, among other fruitful initiatives. The region is home to many folks who share Dobie’s passion for local food.

“There are a lot of small independent food producers here, people with massive gardens, and a few commercial scale growers,” says Dobie. “We’re trying to revitalize our agricultural base,” she explains. “We’re interested in the regional food basket concept. Creston grows grain for example and we can grow heat loving crops like peppers here.”

So, with such a passion for the land and the potential for even more productivity, you might wonder why

Sheila and Karl are selling their thriving farm. “Stuff happens,” says Sheila sadly. Some very unfortunate personal circumstances are forcing them to sell, but Sheila hopes she will one day buy a small parcel of land and start fresh again.

“I’d just love it if this farm, that we’ve put our heart and soul into, would go to people who really want to farm,” says Dobie. “It’s such an important part of our local food system and so connected to people in the area; it’s really a gem.”

For more information on Spencer Hill Orchard, visit their blog or contact Sheila at sheiladobie@shaw.ca. 

 spencerhillorchard.blogspot.ca

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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The Organic Value Chain Roundtable

By Gunta Vitins

Over the past few years, you may have heard of the Organic Value Chain Roundtable and wondered what it was really all about. Well, here is the story.

The Organic Value Chain Roundtable (OVCRT) was officially launched in December 2006 and is one of eleven national value chain roundtables established by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) together with industry. The OVCRT is an industry-government partnership created to help improve the competitiveness and profitability of the Canadian organic sector through cooperation between members of the value chain and federal/provincial government officials.

The OVCRT has well-balanced representation from the organic sector across Canada – small and large growers, processors of food and feed, distributors, retailers, exporters, certifiers, scientists, and representatives from national organizations – all who bring a wealth of experience and insights to the group.

All national value chain roundtables have two co-chairs – one from industry and a senior official from AAFC. I have the great honour of serving as the industry co-chair of the OVCRT, following in the esteemed footsteps of Paddy Doherty, and Tomas Nimmo. My federal counterpart is Jaspinder Komal, Director General of the Science and Technology Branch of AAFC.

What does the OVRT actually do and why should you care?

The OVCRT established four Working Groups to address key sector priorities in market development, regulatory environment, research and innovation, and increasing Canadian production capacity. OVCRT members identify the issues, the Working Groups undertake the research to determine possible solutions, and industry stakeholders, including national and provincial organic sector organizations, determine how to use the information to help the organic sector move forward.

The OVCRT has undertaken and contributed to several key initiatives since its inception. Current projects of the OVCRT include the following:



- The creation of a Canadian organic sector brand strategy to differentiate Canadian organic products from imports and competing labels;
- Gathering information through research and dialogue on issues related to cost of GE contamination of organic production and possible mitigating actions;
- Identifying funding options to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the Canada Organic Standards;
- Identifying research priorities and providing input to the Organic Science Cluster Program;
- Working with regulatory agencies to address regulatory hurdles regarding the use of bio-pesticides, including food-on-food applications; and
- Identifying opportunities to increase domestic production and processing to meet national demand; and many others.

We have also recently completed a strategic plan to chart the OVCRT's course over the next five years. A key outcome of the Canada Organic Sector Brand Strategy is a branding campaign that will be launched

“The OVCRT is... seeking endorsement and feedback from sector organizations on how to customize the brand strategy and chosen concept to meet their needs.”

by the sector during Organic Week 2013. The goals of the brand strategy and campaign are to help create a sense of inclusiveness, unity, pride and support for the Canadian organic sector and to address the issue of “confusion.” According to research, “confusion” is the #1 challenge that is limiting the growth and acceptance of Canadian organic product particularly regarding:

- Competing claims such as “natural,” “pesticide free,” etc.;
- Credibility and awareness of the Canada Organic certification program and logo;
- Health benefits of organic;
- Canadian organic versus imports; and
- Lack of understanding of current organic farming practices and technologies.

The OVCRT conducted research for the brand strategy project over a two-year period through extensive consultations with key stakeholders. Brand concepts were developed and tested through consumer and industry stakeholder surveys. The chosen brand concept, including key messages, were further refined through test markets. Key messaging of the brand concept

revolves around the slogan and imagery of “Think Before You Eat,” plus the tagline “Think Canada Organic,” and provides compelling reasons to choose Canadian certified organic food.

The OVCRT is currently seeking endorsement and feedback from sector organizations on how to customize the brand strategy and chosen concept to meet their needs. Stay tuned for more details from the COABC and the national organizations – Canada Organic Trade Association and Canada Organic Growers – on the rollout of the program.

For more information on the OVCRT and its initiatives, please contact Gunta Vitins at gunta.vitins@gmail.com or visit:

www.ats-sea.agr.gc.ca/rt-tr/org-bio-eng.htm

Gunta Vitins is the Industry Co-Chair of the Organic Value Chain Roundtable, the President of the Canada Organic Trade Association, and a consultant with the Resilient Solutions Consulting team (www.resilient-solutionsconsulting.com).



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Organics

Celebrating 20 years! 1993-2013

The graphic features a central illustration of various organic products including corn, tomatoes, and leafy greens, set against a background of a farm scene with a sun, a cow, and a field.

Two CSA Farmers

A correspondance



Left: Broccoli and cabbage headed for CSA boxes at Ripple Farm Credit: moss dance. Right: Homestead Organic Farm apprentice Claire and farmer, Vanessa, do their best amaranth imitation. Credit: Jordan Marr

By moss dance and Jordan Marr

Editor's note: Jordan Marr and moss dance farm in the Okanagan on Vancouver Island, respectively, and both started CSA programs on their veggie farms within the last couple of years. A CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture program, involves selling subscriptions or shares in the year's crop and then distributing the crop, usually weekly, to subscribers during the season. In this article, Jordan and Moss engage in a conversation comparing the highs and lows of their experiences and outlining their future plans.

Hi Jordan,

I'm really glad we can have this conversation about what it's like to start a CSA. I grow at Ripple Farm and have about 1.5 acres in production. Ripple Farm is transitional to organic with IOPA (Island Organic Producers Association), and located in Merville, just north of Courtenay, BC.

Last year, I started my CSA with 11.5 shares. It was a fantastic experience to meet people who really care about supporting local small-scale food production and to build a sense of community. Several CSA members have become committed supporters of the farm and even mentors. A few CSA supporters at a local co-housing community raised funds to buy a share for families in need. Thanks to their efforts, I was able to donate two half shares to the Immigrant Welcome Centre.

A few CSA members won't be returning this year. The reasons they shared include: they like to plan their meals more in advance, they found there were too many vegetables in the box, and they would rather go to the farmers' market (we have a very good one here in the Comox Valley.) That's fine for me because they can visit our booth there. I'm very committed to finding the people who want to eat directly from the farm and be a part of what I do here.

A year ago, I was possessed by the foolish notion that I can do all of this myself, but I've finally learned my lesson – extroverts should never, ever farm alone.

Quantity of produce was an issue for me last year, likely because of trying to do everything myself. There were times when floods, slugs, and then, ironically, drought overwhelmed me and lowered yields. I found myself approaching other farmers to fill the boxes three times in 20 weeks. I'm relentlessly positive, so I didn't view this as a failure, but more as an opportunity to build community and a reminder that farmers need to work together to succeed.

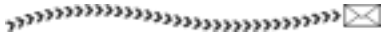
I was certainly proud of was my weekly newsletter, distributed via MailChimp (an online program) and on my farm blog (www.mervilleorganics.ca/ripple-farm). Each week I offered recipes and information about what was happening on the farm. I tried to get members to submit recipes, but it wasn't as popular as I'd hoped! I really wanted more people to be involved with the blog, but the analytics offered through

“...the intent of a traditional CSA is to reorder the marketing relationship to be more in the farmer’s favour and to increase his or her chance of long-term success.”

MailChimp showed me that most folks weren’t reading it.

So, I’m curious about your CSA program, what was your last year like, and what you’re planning for 2013. Drop me a line when you have a minute.

~ moss



Hi moss,

Interesting – our contexts are pretty similar. Vanessa and I grow on 1.5 acres on a lease at The Homestead Farm in Peachland. Our landlords, Joe and Jess Klein, have been farming here for years and are great mentors. We’ve got regional certification with LEOGA (Living Earth Organic Growers Association).

From the get-go, we knew we wanted a CSA to make up a significant amount of our sales. Our goal for the first year was to sell 15 twenty-week subscriptions. We charged \$25/week, paid up front, and included free delivery.

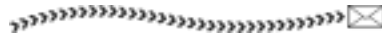
That was a challenging year. Who knew most of Peachland is on the side of a mountain, with roads squirrelling off in every direction? We had two delivery days per week for our 24 customers. We let people choose their delivery day, which meant we couldn’t divide up the route between the days, such that each time we had to drive the same 45 km route. The free delivery killed us, and all the hills killed our truck’s clutch and brakes.

Most of our customers were first-time CSAers. We lost nearly half of them going into season two. Most of the naysayers either didn’t like the lack of choice about what goes in the box, or found they were wasting their money because they couldn’t get through the box each week.

That latter complaint hurt – our boxes were generous, and I honestly believe that we lost customers because of it. That if we had given them less for their money, they wouldn’t have felt like they were wasting it by throwing away the kohlrabi (did we ever over-plant kohlrabi, the only universally-despised veggie in our exit-survey). Customer psychology is strange.

I could go on and on about year one, but I’d better stifle myself. It sounds like your first year was stressful. I can relate to having crop shortfalls – in an attempt to maximize sales we started the program early in the season when crop production is much less predictable. How are you addressing last year’s challenges as you move into this season?

...Jordan



Jordan,

Wow, I feel your pain about the home delivery. Last year, I delivered 17 boxes to individual homes around the Comox Valley, which totalled about four hours of delivery weekly, after the 8-10 hours of harvesting.

Like you, I heard from a few of my CSA members that they couldn’t use all the veggies, even in a half share. I was really surprised by this!

My biggest issues last year were slugs, water supply, labour, and overall morale. This year, I’ve co-created a collaborative CSA box delivery program with Arzeena Hamir at Amara Farm and we’ll offer 30 shares. Our farmscapes are very complimentary – Amara Farm has lots of greenhouse space, and awesome loam soil. Ripple Farm is in a cooler climate pocket and has deer fencing, so many of the field crops will be produced here.

This year, I’ll have the security of knowing that if I have a crop failure, Arzeena will probably have something to fill in. If not, we’ll buy produce from other local growers. Working with the Saanich Organics model, we are hoping to continue expanding our box program next year to include more local growers.

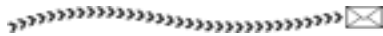
Labour is my most critical issue. I’m glad to say that this year, the son of one of my CSA members will become my first farm apprentice. I also have some friends moving to the farm to lend a hand.

As I look into the crystal ball for the coming year, there’s still a lot of swirling fog! I have a lot of infrastructure to build to improve on my systems and expand my production. But at least I know I’ve got some amazing allies this year to help me through it all.

As for you, what are you doing this year to build on your successes and address the challenges?

~ moss

P.S. I think kohlrabi is a really awesome vegetable.




moss,

We're actually about to enter our third season. In season two we made changes that addressed our initial challenges. We introduced a delivery fee to take care of fuel and wear and tear on the truck. We allowed each customer to name one veggie they never wanted to see in their box, which was easy to accommodate. We introduced a half-share based on semi-monthly delivery. And, we allowed each subscriber to postpone their box twice during the season to accommodate vacations.

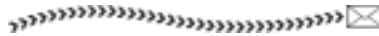
This year I'm struggling with the fact that the more we allow accommodations in an effort to please current customers and acquire new ones, the less appealing it is to sell this way. To my mind, the intent of a traditional CSA is to reorder the marketing relationship to be more in the farmer's favour and to increase his or her chance of long-term success. As we drop various aspects of that model to make the program more con-



venient and appealing to customers, the less enjoyable and useful it becomes.

On a more positive note, I predict that over time, we'll increase the percentage of our customers who are super supportive of what we're doing, and who get the original CSA concept, which is why we'll continue to market this way. And I don't think we'll have to make many more accommodations. Here's hoping!

Good luck with your program this year. Nice to hear you'll have some help! We'll have to check in with each other at the end of the season to trade notes again. 

...Jordan



 www.theruminant.ca
 www.mervilleorganics.ca

moss dance lives in the Comox Valley and runs a CSA program with Amara Farm called Merville Organics (www.mervilleorganics.ca). Jordan Marr is an organic grower in Peachland and editor of The Ruminant, a farming blog that encourages farmers to share their tools and techniques using photos (www.theruminant.ca).



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HIGHLIGHTS

FROM THE 2013 COABC CONFERENCE



Awards and Thank-yous

Left: Rebecca Kneen presents the 2013 COABC Founders' Award to Lee McFadyen, long time organic advocate. Centre: Mary Forstbauer received a standing ovation for her service as COABC's president for 2011/2012. Right: Many thanks to you, Mary for serving BC's organic community with all of your heart! Paddy Doherty also gave an animated thank-you to outgoing Accreditation Director, Anne Macey, for her 10 years of service (see page 4 for photo.)



Good Times!

Left to right: Revelstoke-based old time band, Stuck On Honey filled the dance floor till late Saturday night. Credit: Sara Dent.



Learning

Left: Lucy Sharratt from (Canadian Biotechnology Action Network) updates the crowd on GMOs in Canada. Right: Mojave Kaplan and Martin (Planting Seeds Project) demonstrated seed saving and cleaning techniques. (Credit: Farm Folk City Folk)

Permaculture & Biodynamics at Summerhill Pyramid Winery

By Gabe Cipes

Organic practices have been an integral part of Summerhill since the Kelowna vineyard was purchased by our family in 1986. Producing wine organically has a very meaningful benefit to the environment, and some scientists suggest that eating organic foods greatly benefits our health as well.

Aside from these benefits, we believe that organic practices allow for the grapes in our vineyards to honestly express their surroundings, providing deep, terroir-driven qualities that are a true articulation of Okanagan terroir. Certified organic status was achieved for our cellar in 2007, allowing us to display the certified organic logo on our bottles, ensuring that a level of quality and purity can be expected by the consumer.

We achieved Demeter certification in 2012 after three seasons of sourcing, making and applying all of the nine Biodynamic preparations.

The preparations were applied along with the other organic methods of fertilization, pest and disease control, but this year our vineyard has produced the most significantly abundant and healthy crop of grapes we have seen in many seasons.

In learning the phases of the moon and their relation to the zodiac I used the “Astral calendar” and “Stella Natura” as guides for the timing of inoculating the compost piles and the creation and applications of the field sprays. It has been a very valuable learning process familiarizing myself with the cosmic rhythms. I feel more confident in my ability to observe plants and harvest for flavor, quality and future re-growth.

Biodynamic preparations

Most of the plant materials for the preparations – such as nettle, dandelion, yarrow and horsetail – I found growing in our vineyard and nature reserves. Those plants that I didn’t originally



Biodynamic Preparations

For our new stirring and compost tea station we use old wine barrels and water we are able to pump from the pristine creek. Here, we stir the preparations back and forth creating the spiral vortex said to enliven the field sprays. Alternatively rainwater and flow forms can be used to mix the preps.

Next season, after this fourth season of trialing, I hope to create enough preparations to be able to provide the compost inoculants and field sprays to more organic growers in our bioregion that are interested in pursuing biodynamics to homeopathically build soil fertility and create more resilient crops. I see this method being especially effective in converting conventionally managed farms to organic.

Continued on page 28...



Permaculture Design

My role as the resident biodynamist and permaculturist, aside from responsibility for the preparations, has been to manage and create more biodiversity for ecosystem resilience and human and animal foraging in the vineyard, garden, wildlife preserve and edges of the farm.

We have been building insectuaries, perennial guilds, and new garden spaces with passive water harvesting design. The Summerhill Organic Bistro is the recipient of a half-acre no-till vegetable garden and indigenous fruits and herbs such as elder flowers, chokecherries, Tule hearts and stinging nettle, to name some of the wild crafted items on the menu.

We've implemented new vineyard management strategies with an experimental herbal vineyard companion crops that is set up to expand upon the successful integration of the current fourteen crops being trialed. We are also interested in natural earth building, working with cob, stone and trees. We steward an authentic Syilx Okanagan earth house area and are building cob benches and natural installations to beautify the area and help reveal the consciousness of utilizing all natural and local materials to build homes and structures.



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BC CONTINUES TO LEAD

Organic Market Growth



Credits clockwise from left: Ripple Farm, Halstead Farm, COABC

By Shauna MacKinnon

There is a lot of talk of growth in the organic market and we see evidence all around – new farmers' markets, bigger organic sections in mainstream supermarkets and menu descriptions that tell the story of the organic farmer who grew the produce. Despite these anecdotal signs of expansion, hard numbers on the size and growth rate of the organic market have remained elusive. This lack of available information was the instigator of an ambitious national research project launched last year by the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA).

The primary goal of the project is to demonstrate the value and potential of the organic market to foster further development and support for the sector. In practical terms, the results offer organic businesses – from farmers to retailers and everyone in between – with

hard numbers on the value of organic sales across distribution channels, insights into how the market is changing and targeted research on the Canadian organic consumer.

After much data crunching, the cooperation of many of Canada's leading players in the organic sector and a dedicated steering committee, we are able to offer a realistic look at the Canadian organic market in 2012. The news is good.

BC shoppers lead in organic buying

National consumer research revealed strong support for organic foods in Canada – 58 per cent of Canadians are purchasing organic foods weekly. British Columbia, a historical leader in supporting organic food and

“Over half of British Columbians believe that organic farming is better for a healthy environment; believe organic products are more nutritious; and are avoiding GMOs in their food.”

farming, continues to be a trendsetter. Two-thirds of British Columbians buy organic groceries on a weekly basis, making BC the highest per capita organic grocery purchasers in the country.

The consumer climate for organic foods nationally was found to be receptive with high response rates for key factors that influence the choice of organic foods over conventional items. In BC, the attitudes towards food choices, organic practices and organic products were even more positive with the majority agreeing with statements that are fundamental drivers for the growth and acceptance of organic foods.

For example, two-thirds of British Columbians are willing to pay more for food that they knew is good for themselves and their family. Over half believe that organic farming is better for a healthy environment; believe organic products are more nutritious; and are avoiding GMOs in their food.

When choosing food products Canadians overall are most influenced and trusting of “made in Canada,” “local,” “free-range/grass-fed” and “Canada certified organic” claims. The influence and trust of all of these claims was higher in BC than nationally. Both “natural/all-natural” and “USDA organic” scored well below “Canada certified organic.” In BC, natural claims had less influence and trust than seen nationally. This points to a more educated and savvy audience for organic products in BC.

You can expect greater support to come from BC’s organic buyers. When asked if their organic purchases in specific categories would increase British Columbians’ predicted spending increases above the national average in every organic category.

The BC organic market: Growth in the local and mainstream

The market for certified organic foods in Canada has seen incredible growth overall in the last six years. The value of organic food sales in conventional retail (mainstream grocery banners, mass merchandisers and drug stores) more than doubled during this period. Growth in BC led this trend.

Data tracked by the Nielsen Company shows that BC has the highest rate of organic sales in conventional


retail – 22 per cent of the national total with only 13 per cent of the population. The market share of organic products in conventional retail is highest in BC – organic fresh vegetables enjoy 6.6 per cent of sales in their category, pre-packaged grocery items account for 2.9 per cent of total grocery sales (almost double the national average).

The growth of consumer interest in and awareness about local food has fueled growth in organic sales through direct marketing channels as well. The highest value and best-tracked growth in local food sales in BC is through farmers’ markets.

Certified organic farms are playing a major role at BC farmers’ markets generating an estimated 40 per cent of all sales for a value of \$45.5 million in 2012. That is a substantial share in comparison to provinces such as Ontario where only 10 per cent of farmers’ market sales are attributed to certified organic growers.

The overall organic pie is growing. Growth in conventional retail and direct marketing is not detracting from growth in other distribution channels such as natural health retail and foodservice. Natural health retailers nationally are seeing growth in the double digits and in BC the market success of BC-based organic coffee roasters is contributing to a rise in organic foodservice sales.

Much more

Thanks to a grant provided through the Organic Sector Development Initiative detailed information on market trends and consumer research is available for BC. The full BC report, released in early April, is available at www.ota-canada.ca. Watch for the full national report in the fall of 2013. 

 www.ota-canada.ca

Shauna MacKinnon has been working on food issues for over a decade. She is currently the Projects & Development Manager for the Canada Organic Trade Association.

COTA would like to extend a special thank you to the project’s funders, steering committee and to all of the companies who generously shared their information and insights.

Wildlife Management

Beyond the Pond: Amphibian Habitat on the Farm



O'Reilly Farm in Oliver sets a great example by protecting Park Rill Creek and educating neighbours about amphibian habitat protection. Credit: Alyson Skinner

By Margaret Holm

You are outside starting work early in the morning. Half-awake, you reach inside the valve box to turn on the water and something brushes against your hand. It could be a garter snake or a spotted frog, or something more unusual like a Tiger Salamander or Great Basin spadefoot.

In the spring, amphibians make their way from their winter habitats to breeding ponds where adults mate and females lay their eggs. Around the world, they are declining due to development and agriculture encroaching on breeding areas. Amphibians are very sensitive to environmental change so the use of pesticides and general climate warming are causing drastic declines. For this reason, the status of amphibian populations is often an indication of the health of the surrounding ecosystems.

As an organic farmer, you may have a chorus of frogs at night or salamanders that breed in your pond. Your property is an important part of the mosaic of natural habitat and agricultural land that many species now depend on.

Because wetlands are critical for the survival of wildlife, and are disappearing across British Columbia, the provincial government has recently strengthened the Water Act, making it illegal to alter any natural watercourse, including creeks, springs, ravines, swamps and dry gulches on private land and agricultural land without approval. Modifications to these natural areas must be approved by the Resource Stewardship Division of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

Perhaps you have a low area that fills with water in the spring, or a stand of cattails at the margin of your field. Even small and temporary patches of wetland are invaluable to amphibians. Protecting wetlands goes hand-in-hand with organic fruit production at the O'Reilly farm on Park Rill Creek near Oliver, which serves as a great example of the possibilities.

David O'Reilly and Allison Cran know that the creek and its fringe of trees and shrubs are good for their farm, and vital to the health of the region as a whole. They have placed a conservation covenant on a portion of their certified organic farm and bed & breakfast, protecting the wetland and riparian habitat in perpetuity. David and Allison have also built an additional wetland and converted a portion of the farm back to natural habitat. They are encouraging neighbours to protect the creek and are active members of "Friends of Park Rill."

David and Allison began their stewardship work on the property by reducing the amount of mowing near the creek. This action alone resulted in a significant and rapid increase of trees and shrubs within the riparian (creek side) plant community. To assist the recovery of the habitat, native shrubs and trees were planted, with assistance from the South Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship program.

They have hosted a riparian workshop on their property so that other landowners could learn and be inspired to follow suit. Bat houses and nest boxes for owls, swallows and wood ducks have also been installed to create additional wildlife habitat.

“As an organic farmer... [your] property is an important part of the mosaic of natural habitat and agricultural land that many species now depend on.”




Four ways you can help amphibians on your property

- 1 Maintain ponds, wetlands and seasonally flooded areas.
- 2 Allow natural vegetation to grow up around these areas.
- 3 Make sure any organic fungicides are applied when the wind is low and so they don't affect areas where amphibians might live.
- 4 Thinking of doing some dredging, draining or infilling? Please consider the environmental values of our treasured wetlands. If you are unsure if your work is covered under the Water Act and would like more information, or if you see wetlands being damaged, call your local Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

The SOS Stewardship Program works in the South Okanagan and Similkameen, helping landowners learn about wildlife and habitats on their property and finding support for restoration, fencing and replanting projects. Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust, the GO-ERT Society on Vancouver Island, and East Kootenay Conservation Program also help landowners in their regions.

For wildlife stewardship tips, and profiles of farmers, vineyard owners and other folks who have signed on as Wildlife Habitat Stewards check out:

 www.soscp.org/stewardship


And when it comes to irrigation valve boxes, never reach your hand in without checking first! The next wildlife management article will be on snakes—another species that likes to hide in cool dark spots. 

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

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Organic Certification

Issues, challenges & options for BC producers

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

The Small-Scale Certification Research Project (SSCRP) team has been exploring options that would encourage non-certified organic operators to come under the umbrella of certification in BC.

According to 2006 Statistics Canada figures, there are over 2,700 “non-certified organic” producers operating in this province. This high number implies that the current certification model may not be meeting the needs of all organic producers, particularly small-scale operators. Also, consumers are confused about which products are truly produced to organic standards.

This situation in BC has been compounded due to the fact that the COABC and BC stakeholders have spent over 20 years, since the launch of the BC Certified Organic Program (BCCOP), educating consumers to seek out product labelled “certified organic” as the third party certification is the organic guarantee. With the implementation of the federal Organic Products Regulations in 2009, the term “certified” has been deemed redundant and is now not necessary nor allowed to be used on labels of inter-provincially or internationally traded products in Canada.

Additional complications abound when there is no mandatory organic regulation within BC to align provincial and federal laws. The COABC continues to seek a mandatory regulation that will require products marketed as “organic,” “organically grown,” etc. in

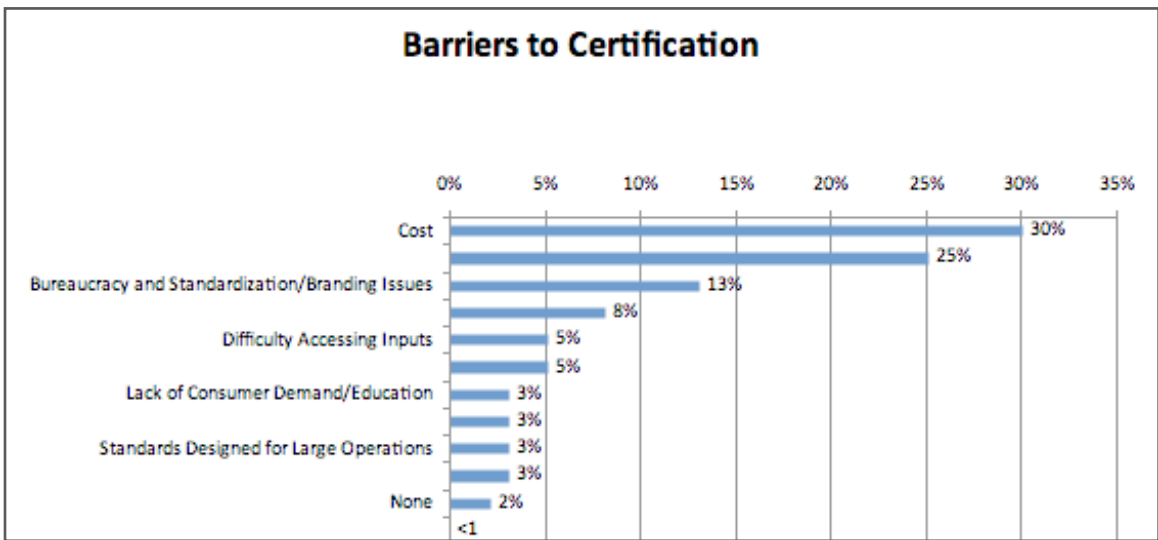
BC to be produced in accordance with the Canada Organic Standards and certified by a certification body accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) under the Canada Organic Regime and/or the BCCOP.

With these issues in mind, the SSCR team has solicited extensive feedback through surveys and public consultation with the organic and conventional farming communities on barriers to certification and possible alternative models. The team presented key findings at the 2013 COABC Conference in Vernon on February 23, where further input was collected on proposed solutions to certification barriers.

Some of the key barriers to certification identified by sector stakeholders during the public consultations and surveys included: cost of certification; paperwork associated with certification; and the time commitment needed for the paperwork and the certification process itself.

There were also concerns raised around a lack of standardization and cohesive branding particularly when producers do not have to be certified to sell their products as organic in BC. Some participants stated that they experienced difficulties complying with standards, while many felt there was a lack of education and support for producers, as well as a lack of con-

Continued on page 29...



The Natural Illusion

by Brenda Frick

“How many animals of each kind did Moses put on the ark?” When asked this question, most people simply answer “2”. They know that Noah was the ark-meister. They just don’t notice that Moses has been slipped into Noah’s place in the question. They are focusing on number of animals.

In psychology, this is referred to as the “Moses Illusion.” It is the most well-known example of a general concept called the semantic illusion. People often don’t notice word substitutions if their focus is elsewhere, especially if the changed item is similar to the one for which it was substituted.

People have busy and stressful lives. It is not surprising to find that our focus often is elsewhere while buying food – perhaps on the kids, the mortgage and the politics at work. Even if we do have our “eyes on the prize,” it is probably chicken and carrots and breakfast cereal, rather than organic chicken, organic carrots and organic breakfast cereal that holds our focus. So it’s not surprising that “natural” foods, usually prominently displayed and easy to find, end up in our baskets.

It’s also easy to see why people accept the word “natural” as being in the same category as “organic.” Both terms imply that the product is grown and raised and made in collaboration with nature, without poisons or other additives.

In a national survey done by the Hartman group in the USA, consumers identified 6 attributes that they associated equally with organic and natural labels. These qualities were all things that were absent: pesticides, herbicides, growth hormones, artificial flavours/colours/preservatives, genetically modified foods and antibiotics.

To consumers “natural” and “organic” mean pretty much the same thing: healthy, whole and real. But is this perception correct?

First let’s look at the natural label. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has guidelines for natural food. For them it’s all about post-harvest handling.

Natural foods should not contain food additives. They should have nothing removed except water. They should be minimally processed, or left unprocessed. Natural foods should contain only natural ingredients.

In this definition of natural, what happens before harvest or slaughter doesn’t really matter. There is nothing here about pesticide use, synthetic fertilizers, hormones, or antibiotics. If you want to avoid these things, the word ‘natural’ is not an indication of what you want. When you buy a natural product, the ingredients were grown or raised under conventional production methods. Plants were likely grown with synthetic fertilizers and were sprayed with pesticides.

And as to the type of processing, there are guidelines. However, even CFIA suggests that the word “natural” is “often misused on labels and advertisements. There is no regulation to prevent this. Manufacturers and producers may use these terms without any restrictions.

What about “natural” meat? Consumers expect that the natural product is raised without growth hormones or antibiotics, without cages, with a diet of grass and forage. What is the truth behind “natural meat”? As with plants, CFIA suggestions only apply to processing. The animals were raised in conventional production systems and likely were given antibiotics, and

Continued on page 27...



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Targeted Grazing

for weed control on organic farms



Credit: Rocky Ridge Vegetation Control, Conrad & Donna Lindblom.

By Marjorie Harris

The invasive spread of noxious weeds has been identified as a significant threat to healthy ecological processes and has been compared to global warming, ozone depletion and loss of biodiversity.

Weeds have always been more of a bane to farming than a boon and, over the centuries, the practice of employing livestock to munch down the weeds to more or less control them is as old as grazing itself. Promoting grazing as a weed management tool and a potential new paid service industry is a more recent phenomenon currently taking foothold in the land management arena.

Everyone knows that goats try to nibble on everything in sight, and now that natural chew-on-anything-once instinct is being put to use in an innovative and scientific approach to control noxious weeds called prescribed or targeted grazing. While targeted grazing can successfully alter landscapes, the plan may require three to five years of repeated grazing.

Many studies have demonstrated that targeted livestock grazing using ruminants, cows, goats and sheep, can effectively reduce the abundance of noxious weeds. Cows and sheep often need a little training to be willing to accept weedy forages that are new to them.

Kathy Voth, of the Cows Eat Weeds project, explains that in 10 days, a small group of replacement heifers can be taught to include specific weeds into their diet and when returned to the

Continued on page 26...

CAN/CGSB 32.310 (sec. 5.6.1)

Pest, disease and weed control aimed at... reducing losses caused by weeds... include cultural practices... and grazing.

Note: A certified organic operation may employ organic or non-organic grazing domestic livestock for weed control. Compliance with (sec. 5.5.2) for land application of manure in human food cropping areas observes the 120 day pre-harvest interval.

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Three notable research projects on targeted grazing in British Columbia

1. **Cows Eat Weeds** is a finished research project that Trisha McKinney headed up in the Williams Lake region a year ago, when she was coordinator of the Cariboo Central Coast Invasive Plant Council. Kathy Voth was hired as a private grazing consultant out of Colorado.
2. **Goats Grazing Weeds** is an on-going research project in the Kamloops area for the past 2 years. Jo-Ann Fox, Program Manager for the Southern Interior Weed Management Committee (SI-WMC) is working with Conrad & Donna Lindblom of Rocky Ridge Vegetation Control.
3. **Sheep on Reforestation Sites**, while not a research project, is a program that provided ‘bushing’ services for reforestation sites. As the, Provincial Sheep Health Check Auditor from 1999 to 2011, Dr. Peter Stockdale found that “there appears to be consensus that using sheep on suitable reforestation sites to control competing vegetation is effective, economic, ecologically sound and socially responsible.” The cost of using sheep was within 15% lower than the cost of manual or chemical methods being employed.



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home herd, they will teach the other cattle to target the new forage plant.

Kathy wrote up a cow training plan that mixed wheat bran with Oxeye Daisy for Bob Godfrey of Horsefly, BC, who wanted his cows to learn to eat the Oxeye Daisy and he proved that with “a little perseverance and some adaptation, even that challenge can be overcome.”

Trisha McKinney reports that Spotted Knapweed and Canada Thistle, included along with other forages, have been found to be as nutritional as alfalfa and can provide decent livestock weight gain. A typical pasture contains 38% weeds and if the livestock are taught to graze these weeds pressure is reduced on the grass lands. In the month of August, Spotted Knapweed has almost 10% protein, at a time when most grasses typically have 2-3% and cows need 7-8% protein in their diet during this season.

Studies in the USA and Canada have shown that targeted grazing is cost effective, being three times less expensive than herbicide spraying in an equally-sized weed control area. Jo-Ann Fox manager of Goats Grazing Weeds in the Kamloops area, enthusiastically states that, “targeted grazing is an excellent option for organic farmers.”

Successful programs include:

- Williams Lake (Cows): Dalmatian Toadflax, Oxeye Daisy, Spotted Knapweed, Sulphur Cinquefoil.
- Peace McKenzie (Goat): Dalmatian Toadflax and Spotted Knapweed.
- Logan Lake (Goat): Russian Knapweed, Canada Thistle, Blueweed.
- Kamloops (Goat): Dalmatian Toadflax and selective removal of Snowberry.
- BC Hydro Transmission Line Right of Way (Goat): Alternatively, the snowberry was selectively saved for the deer as winter food.

Conrad and Donna Lindblom of Rocky Ridge Vegetation Control are at pres-

ent the only operation offering targeted grazing goat services on a larger commercial scale in Western Canada. They have been in this industry for 14 years, and started in Northern BC working for the forest industry tree planting programs taking out the canopy brush and weeds in spruce and pine plantations.

Rocky Ridge Vegetation Control has worked for over three years with the Alberta Conservation Association and other agencies restoring Riparian Zones in abandoned fields so that the natural grasses can re-colonize the areas.

Conrad explains that goats are a great tool for managing vegetation and are particularly good in urban areas because their small hooves make small impacts and the animals are so light that there is little to no soil compaction, and they can work in places where mowers and people can't get into. Conrad suggests putting goats into pasture with cattle herds for the added economic benefits of both being able to sell goat

Table 1


*Cross referenced to include BC Noxious Weed List Part 1 & 2; Livestock Grazing Guidelines for Controlling Noxious Weeds in the Western United States; Cows Eat Weeds; and Goats Grazing Weeds. *Updated with Trisha McKinney's research in Williams Lake. **Updated with Goats Grazing Weeds.*

British Columbia Noxious Weed List 1 & 2	Sheep	Goats	Cattle
Blueweed (Echium vulgare)	UN	✓**	UN
Burdock (Artemisium spp)	UN	UN	✓
Canada Thistle (Cirsium arvense)	✓	✓	✓
Dalmatian Toadflax (Linaria genistifolia ssp)	✓	✓	✓*
Diffuse Knapweed (Centaurea diffusa)	✓	✓	✓
Gorse (Ulex europaeus)	✓	✓	NR
Kochia (Kochia scoparia)	✓	✓	✓
Leafy Spurge (Euphorbia esula)	✓	✓	Poisonous
Oxeye Daisy (Chrysanthemum leucanthemum)	UN	UN	✓*
Perennial Pepperweed (Lepidium latifolium)	✓	✓	✓
Plumeless Thistle (Carduus acanthoides)	UN	✓**	UN
Purple Loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria)	NR	NR	MS
Quackgrass (Agropyron repens)	✓	✓	✓
Rush Skeletonweed (Chondrilla juncea)	✓	NR	✓
Russian Knapweed (Acroptilon repens)	✓	✓	NR
Scotch Thistle (Salsola kali)	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Knapweed (Centaurea maculosa)	✓	✓	✓*
Sulphur Cinquefoil (Potentilla recta)	UN	UN	✓*
Tansy Ragwort (Senecio jacobaea)	✓	NR	Poisonous
Yellow Starthistle (Centaurea solstitialis)	✓	✓	✓
Yellow Toadflax (Linaria vulgaris)	NR	MS	NR

✓ Suitable for livestock grazing; NR-Not recommended; MS-Marginally suitable; UN-Unknown; Poisonous

products, and the goats' ability to improve the cattle pasture. The goats will take out the weeds and Buckbrush and after two or three years the pasture will be visibly healthier.

Surprisingly, it was found that goats prefer non-grass first, they eat top down from the flower head, if it is present. Goats graze in a circular path making several passes through an area. They eat different plants at different times of the day, as do cows, which is thought to have something to do with the moisture content of the plants.

Goats like to eat Canada Thistle when it is young early in the season and they continue eating it down all season long as tender growth develops. The Lindbloms are willing to mentor more people to expand this service industry and they describe how they have been developing their own goat breed that is easy to handle and good on rough terrain. 

Marjorie Harris, BSc, A. Ag, is an IOIA Inspector who supports conscientious stewardship of agriculture in harmony with nature.

References & Resources

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- Kathy Voth, email: kvoth@livestockforlandscapes.com. Website: <http://thetaoofcow.livestockforlandscapes.com/?s=oxey>
- Trisha McKinney MSc. P. Ag.: Coordinator. Cows Eat Weeds was a project done in the Williams Lake region, while Trisha was Coordinator of the Cariboo Central Coast Invasive Plant Council. Trisha's articles can be found online: BC Cattlemen, www.cattlemen.bc.ca/docs/targeted%20grazing.pdf. Cows Eat Weeds: www.cattlemen.bc.ca/docs/bc_cows_love_weeds.pdf
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- Using Biomass to Estimate Carrying Capacity: www.glti.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/publications/nrph.html
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...The Natural Illusion, continued from page 23

feed that was treated with fertilizers and pesticides. Beef animals likely received growth hormones.

As the term "natural" is unregulated, the integrity of the claim depends on the integrity of the seller. If you talk to the producer, you can ask. If you deal with a retail establishment, most staff are woefully misinformed. According to Consumer Reports, "there is no guarantee that [grocery store consumers] will receive the correct information about the products they are buying."


Now let's consider the organic label. The "organic" claim is regulated in Canada. Products must be certified to the organic standard to bear the "organic" label. This means that the farms and factories are inspected, and actually meet the regulation.

The Canadian Organic Regulation mandates that crops are grown with methods that restore and sustain the environment; provide soil fertility using biological means, not synthetic fertilizers; and manage pests with biological, mechanical and cultural techniques, not toxic chemicals.

Under the Canadian Organic Regulation, animals must be provided with living conditions and space appro-

priate to their behavioural requirements; with organic diets; and healthy, reduced stress conditions. Antibiotics, hormones and genetically engineered products are forbidden.

Organic processing is also held to a strict standard that maintains the organic integrity through all processes from farm to the point of sale. The way processing is done and the products that may be used are regulated. Food additives are minimized, and are largely limited to those of organic origin. Even cleaning, storage and packaging is regulated.

From this it is clear that "organic" and "natural" are not similar claims. We need to educate consumers to be more vigilant, to pay attention, and not substitute natural for organic. Ironically, if we want to be sure we are getting the qualities of natural – grown, handled, processed in ways that value nature and respect the consumer – we need to pass over the natural product and reach for the organic one. 

Brenda Frick, Ph.D., P.Ag. is an Organic Research and Extension specialist. She welcomes your comments at 306-260-0663 or via email at organic@usask.ca. Thanks to Amanda Bristol for telling me about the 'Moses Illusion.'

have but since have established are white oak bark, chamomile and valerian, which I sourced from Walter Harvey at the Demeter-certified Harvey's Orchards in Cawston, BC.

Since there is no Demeter certified charcuterie bio-regionally, the inspector said it was acceptable to source the animal parts needed for the preparations from the certified organic Okanagan Meats in Enderby and the lactating cow manure from the certified organic Vale Farms near Lumby.

Horns and Silica were purchased from the BC Biodynamic board of directors, which I joined in 2010. I used the book *Grasp the Nettle* by Peter Proctor primarily for creating the preparations after cross-referencing the information, I found it to be the most succinct and complete how-to guide for creating all of the preparations.

Grounding Biodynamic farming in a context

I've also learned by networking with other biodynamic farmers, though they are few and far between. In researching and reading biodynamic literature I realized how precious it is as a resource for ancient sacred earth knowledge.

Demeter was the first ever organic certification and was founded in the 1920s by a large group of German farmers who noticed soil fertility drop after one season's application of chemical fertilizers. The group consulted Rudolph Steiner and created this method of enhancing or enlivening soils using a blend of natural science and Pagan ritual.

In the early 1940s, Biodynamists were persecuted by the Nazis and industrial agriculture swept over the whole world. Hence the secret code numbers 500-508 are still used today to define the preparations.


Today's science and the understanding of the microcosmic world can quantify the effects of homeopathy and the use of microbial preparations in regards to the soil food web. Biodynamics is now being studied and appreciated on level that the current generation of farmers can embrace. For instance it is practiced all over India to re-enliven the farmlands of which in-

dustrial monocultures have created mass desertification.

Experimenting and learning

One of the learning experiences I had in the spring of 2012 when digging up the cow horn/manure field spray (500), is that I noticed it took nine months instead of the six months that I expected for the whole contents of the horn to turn from green cow manure into the ideal rich dark humus characteristic of the 500. Perhaps this was because I experimented in the autumn of 2011 by burying it in a fecund area of the wetland instead of burying it in the culinary garden as done in previous years.

I continued to observe the horn preparation in the wetland until I found it to be fully matured, which was also an indication that the other preparations also buried around the wetland would be mature as well. After further research, I found the suggestion that preparations be buried in an area that has been treated year to year with biodynamic compost and green manure, which increases the microbial activity of the topsoil. Last autumn I buried the preps for this spring in the garden once again.

In the coming year, we are preparing to integrate animals such as bees, owls, chickens and pond life. We are looking at the entire farm and business as a holistic entity and endeavor to obtain a yield, whilst producing zero waste and in my father's words allowing nature to speak for herself. 

 www.summerhill.bc.ca

Gabe Cipes is the resident biodynamist and permaculturalist at Summerhill Pyramid Organic Winery.



sumer understanding and demand for certified local organic products.

Some possible solutions to overcome these barriers were also suggested, such as: finding efficiencies to reduce the certification costs and paperwork; employing alternative certification models; more research and extension to overcome production challenges; and more outreach and community engagement. Many technical issues could be resolved with effective outreach, education, and support particularly regarding the certification process and navigating the standards.

Some alternative models for certification were also explored by the research team and were presented at the conference including:

- COABC's "Low-Risk" Program (currently offered by PACS and IOPA)
- Organic Pledges
- Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) (i.e. Certified Naturally Grown, Community Verified Organic, Kootenay Mountain Grown, Brazil's Organic Social Control)
- Group Certification
- Professional Farmer Certification

Possible solutions to overcome barriers to certification were also presented at the conference. Solutions that do not involve developing a new certification system or model include:

- Encouraging more Certifying Bodies (CBs) to offer Risk Assessment programs (Low Risk)
- Encouraging CBs to offer orientation workshops and develop info brochures on certification for outreach purposes
- Launching a web based interface for initial applications and renewals, for completing Organic System Plans, and managing internal record keeping
- Providing an opportunity for CBs to electronically post all operator Organic System Plans, de-certifications, suspensions, and other sanctions taken to create transparency in the system
- Developing an easy-to-use public complaint system
- Creating an electronic score card system which allows operators to self assess their compliance to organic production standards
- Creating a "New Option" for certification for operators that sell in short supply chains (direct to customers or restaurants).


The "New Option" takes the best of all the alternative models studied and melds them into a cohesive

option that addresses all assurance requirements while attempting to meet everyone's needs. Under the "New Option," each farmer would attend a training session (face-to-face or virtual) offered either by the CB or possibly by the COABC.

Each farmer then signs a pledge that includes a commitment to allow consumer site visits and compliance assessments. For biosecurity reasons, the farmer may choose to restrict windows of access by the public. The farmer also completes their Organic System Plan via an electronic interface, outlining their commitment to the Canada Organic Standards.

The CB is responsible for completing desk reviews on all members and conducting random unannounced inspections on 10% of their members annually. The Verification Officers (VOs) complete site inspections targeting specific issues (not a full inspection) on the 10% randomly selected members unless there are concerns and a full site inspection becomes necessary. The VO uploads their findings onto the electronic interface and the CB makes their determination. The CB also employs marketplace surveillance.

This program could be delivered by existing CBs, if they feel so inclined, or by a new regional CB that deals exclusively with groups of operators. The fee for such a program would need to be assessed, but could be in the range of \$150 - \$200 annually per farm. After the three year transition period, or a shorter timeframe with affidavit, the operator would be allowed to use the BCCOP logo.

Detailed information on the alternative models, the "New Option," and other solutions to certification barriers will be presented in the final SSCRP Report, which will be completed by April 30, 2013. 

For more information...

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Events & Announcements

Barn Dance with Greenwood

- Yarrow Ecovillage Community Farm, April 27. Potluck at 5:30. Adults \$10 advance at: barn-dance.eventzilla.net. \$12 at door. Kids free.

BC Food Systems Network 15th Annual Gathering

- July 5-7, 2013 at George Pringle Memorial Camp in Shawnigan Lake. The theme for this year's event is "Food from the water, food from the land". Explore a wide range of issues related to producing and gathering food in British Columbia. Join the listserv to find out more: fooddemocracy.org/our-listservs or find out more on Facebook: www.facebook.com/events/135703103274584

Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Okanagan food map

- This direct marketing tool benefits both residents and tourists alike, and provides a cost effective meth-

od for local farms and businesses to connect with consumers. Early bird registration extended until April 19, 2013. For info and registration: buylocalbc.org

The 14th annual Salt Spring Island Apple Festival

is on Sunday September 29, 2013, mark your calendars! For more information visit: www.salt-springmarket.com/apples

National Organic Week is from September 21-28 this year, mark your calendars and start planning events early. For more information and to list your event visit: www.organicweek.ca

The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN)

is leading the campaign against GM alfalfa in Canada. Visit their website at www.CBAN.ca for information on the issues and how to get involved.

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in Grand Forks BC, Spencer Hill Orchard, \$480,000. 8 acres in full operation with large home, Market Garden and Orchard, Willing to take offers.

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250-458-2441

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www.propertyguys.com,
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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



Investment
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Agri-Food Canada

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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