

# BC *Organic Grower*



*British  
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# President's Message

by Linda Edwards

The big story for the B.C. organic community this summer is, of course, the IFOAM Congress in Victoria, and I know that everyone is trying to find a way to get there. We are thrilled to be able to host the world organic community, and to have this opportunity get the latest scientific information, and to learn from the experience and expertise of so many different people. Not to mention the new friends – organic producers and handlers from all over the world. IFOAM will be a little like our own late-night practical discussions and philosophical debates, writ large. Not an event to miss!

Brian and I attended an IFOAM Trade Conference shortly after we became organic growers. It was a wonderful introduction into the wider world of organics that broadened our perception of organics as well our list of valuable contacts. Three years ago we attended another, this time one of the scientific ones. The wealth of information we gained was equalled by the amazing people we met: a California organic wine producer doing innovative pest control, the owner of Tesco, one of the largest purchasers and sellers of organic food in the UK, a Bolivian landless farmer who grew tomatoes and melons, the Japanese scientists who were studying microorganisms to replace chemical fumigants, leading agroecologists and scientists working in regard to finding solutions for organic problems, world renown and inspiring activists. ... Did I mention about the fun part as well? Great social and cultural events are also planned for the congress in Victoria.

The Congress itself is August 21-24 and the Organic World Exhibition is August 24-25.

On the national scene, it would seem we have made progress in upgrading the Canadian organic standards. JoAnn Sandhu, Rochelle Eisen and I have attended meetings in Ottawa

in March and again at the end of May to participate in their revision. This action was initiated by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in January to upgrade the Standard so it could be used to enter into equivalency agreements to facilitate trade of organic products with the European Union, the United States and Canada. It has been an interesting process. Representatives from organic organizations from all across Canada were invited to participate plus various representatives from user and general interest groups. At the first meeting, everyone attending mainly identified their major areas of interest and concern. The Materials lists were the most obviously in need of work. This was delegated to working groups and then another meeting scheduled for May to work towards adoption. We (Rochelle and I) went through the COABC Crops Materials list and incorporated for discussion all items differing from the EU, the US and Japan. This list is of course based on the OMRI model. This was adopted by the Committee as a model for all of the materials lists. So when you see the Canadian Standards Materials lists you will find it difficult to distinguish them from those of the COABC. This facilitated the whole process considerably and it now appears that we might actually get the revisions done and on schedule. Someone has been hired to pull together all of the material and have it ready to be presented for approval (or not) by the end of June. The next step after that will be for Agriculture Canada to enter into trade negotiations for ISO 65 equivalency agreements.

In retrospect the above may be the easy part. Issues still to be dealt with are the policing and enforcement of the standard by anyone who wishes to use it. The Standards Council of Canada will carry out the audits required. However, it is not clear who the "competent

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body(ies)” will be to work with the CFIA and oversee the whole process. To date only two bodies in Canada have adopted the SCC as an auditor: ProCert, a private certifier, and OPAM in Manitoba.

The Standard is at this point voluntary. However, there is a very strong feeling from all of the other provinces at the meetings to make it mandatory. This is a discussion BC organic growers need to have over the winter. In the fall issue of the BC Organic Grower, various points of view on the topic will be presented.

I want to thank Rochelle Eisen who attended both meetings and contributed extensively, especially to the issues relating to processing and labelling. As she has done many times in the past, she did this as a volunteer. Also, JoAnn Sandhu played an invaluable role at the meetings representing the provincial government and COABC very well. Thank you JoAnn! Rochelle’s and my expenses to attend the meetings were at least partially covered by donations from the following companies: Pro-Organics (who both contributed and contacted others on our behalf), the Cawston Cold Storage, Nature’s Path Foods, Community Natural Foods, Penticton Organic, Blue Moon Organics and Joy Distributors. Thank you!

More good news! After about a year of hard work, initially by Paddy Doherty and then by Rochelle Eisen, full approval and funding has been received from the federal Office of Learning Technologies for what we have come to know as the LTW (Learning Technologies in the Workplace) project. This is a two year project being coordinated by Rochelle to increase organic agriculture information resources using the Internet and to upgrade farmers skills in accessing Internet information. Rochelle will be organizing and carrying out projects to provide technical information and training courses and to improve information sources now available through the Internet for producers. See her article on p. 23.

The Strategic Plan to access the Agri-Food Futures Fund has been completed and approved. This ends the work of the Strategic Planning Committee, and I want to thank Bob McCoubrey, Roger Breed, Gunta Vitins, and Debra Boyle, Tracey Innes, JoAnn Sandhu, Kerry Clark, Cathleen Kneen and Paddy Doherty for all their hard work in getting us to this point. We will be set up to receive project proposals by July 19th. A special issue of the BCOG will give members a summary of the Strategic Plan and information about the kinds of projects that might qualify for assistance. The information will also be available on the COABC website. (See article p. 4.)

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## **BC Organic Grower**

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Also now available on the COABC website is the Canadian version of the OMRI Brand names list on the COABC website (see p. 29). Over the winter we will be discussing how to expand this to include products that are allowed but not assessed by OMRI.

It is customary to expect we will all get down to the business of farming and the summer will be a less active period for the COABC. However, there will be one new project which will begin in July. This is the food safety pilot project, initiated by the BCMAFF and approved at the last COABC directors meeting. (See page 20) Lee McFadyen is chairing a committee for the COABC which will help direct and oversee the project. Jill Rothe, Peter Johnston, Daniel Terry and Harvie Snow are also on the committee. Contact them if you have any questions.

May your crops grow well and your harvest be bountiful! See you at IFOAM.



## ***Organic Sector Initiative Funding Approved***

After many months of hard work and consultation, COABC's Strategic Plan has been accepted by the Agri-Food Futures Fund. On the basis of the Plan, we now have access to the \$1million allocated to the Organic Sector Initiative.

An Administrative Committee appointed by the COABC Board will receive and approve project proposals from farmers, researchers, and indeed COABC itself. The Strategic Plan provides a guideline for the disbursement of the Fund:

- 45-65% of the Fund allocated to projects addressing Production Capacity
- 30-40% to Marketplace Development and Promotion
- 5-10% to Organic Environmental Stewardship.

These three priorities were developed on the basis of the consultations which the Strategic

Planning Committee had with COABC members over the last year.

Overall, the \$1million Fund will need to be matched 50-50 from outside sources. However, projects which have high priority and wide relevance to all of the BC organic sector may receive as much as 80% of their funds from the OSI.

The deadline for the first round of proposals is July 19, 2002. This early deadline was set in order to facilitate a couple of urgent projects initiated by COABC. However, only a small portion of the overall fund will be allocated to COABC-initiated projects.

Details of the Strategic Plan, the priorities, the guidelines for application and the application form are available on the COABC website and will be mailed to every member of a COABC member organization in early July.





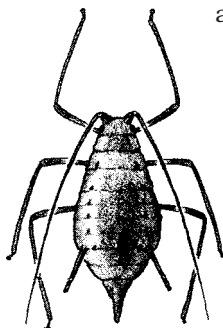
# Why Predators and Parasites Don't Always Work

by Linda Edwards

Largely because of biological control agents, organic farms often have less insect and mite damage than conventional ones do. However, that is not always the case. And when the biological controls do fail, there is very frequently nothing that can be done and a lot of damage can occur.

In tree fruits, this can happen with aphids. Year after year, aphid populations can be so low – thanks to a whole array of predators and parasites – that we hardly even notice them. This is not the case in our conventional neighbours' blocks where annual sprays of pesticides for aphid control are the norm. However, there are years when aphid populations soar and cause a lot of damage in organic farms. This is such a year. There are some tree blocks that I find it painful to visit. Rosy apple aphids have already destroyed the fruit on many of the trees and will stunt their growth this year. This aphid injects a toxin into the leaves it is feeding on, which is translocated to nearby fruit causing them to become stunted and deformed. This also happens to shoots.

Why does this happen? Usually (and certainly this is the case this year), it is because of weather. We have had a very cool spring. Under those conditions pests like aphids always survive and thrive far better than predators and parasites. Insects and mites have no internal heating mechanisms. They are all dependent on external heat in order to feed, fly, hunt or reproduce. Something like an aphid sits attached to its food source. All it needs is a few minutes of sun and warmth every once in awhile in order to be able to feed and survive until another day. On the other hand a predator or parasite has to search for its food and may not find it in those brief moments of warmth. Mortality rates are high and reproductive rates very low for them during cool periods. Now that it has warmed up, lady bugs, Aphidoletes, syrphids and many other bio-control populations have started increasing exponentially. Within a week to ten days, the aphid



populations will be under control. However, the damage has already been done.

There are other reasons why biological controls don't always work. Most of our worst insect and mite pests are not native. They arrived here without the array of predators and parasites and diseases that evolved with them at their site of origin. Without these they frequently increase to high levels and become very serious pests.

Examples in my sector are codling moth, cherry fruit fly and weeds like knapweed, bindweed and toadflax. Efforts to introduce their suppressant agents sometimes work, for example, the beetle that was introduced to control St John's Wort.

Everyone was happy about how well the beetle reduced levels of the plant when it was a noxious range weed. Now that it is viewed at least by some as a medicinal herb, there is less


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enthusiasm about the success of this introduction. Many times though, even with multiple introductions, weeds like knapweed continue to thrive. This is because some of the introduced agents cannot survive under our conditions, or the most effective cannot be introduced because they would also attack a plant we consider valuable. An example of that is biological controls of Canada thistle, many of which would also attack the closely related globe artichoke. Once they are released into the environment, there is no recall. Finally, a complex of suppressant biological control agents is usually required to keep an insect or mite below levels where they become a pest. It is a very rare thing that anything is controlled by just one organism. Introductions of a whole range of predators and parasites with careful screening to ensure problems such as the ones described above do not occur, takes a long time.

Sometimes, too, biological control agents are active against a pest but the level of control they provide is not enough to achieve a profitable crop. There is a tiny wasp that can parasitize and kill up to 90% of all codling moth eggs laid. However, fruit damage from the remaining 10% of the pests that survive will be so high that it can result in a crop not worth picking. It is not in the best interests of a predator or pest to wipe out its host no matter how much we might want that to occur and there are natural processes that have evolved to prevent that from happening. Biological control agents may not work the way we want them to because poor timing or synchrony; for example, the biological control agent may attack the pest after it has already caused damage. Many leafroller parasites lay their eggs only on larger caterpillars to ensure that there will be enough food for their offspring. By then of course the caterpillar has probably already caused crop damage. There are periods too when the predator or parasite are in a life stage that is not

effective against the pest. An example is *Aphidoletes aphidomyza*, a very effective aphid predator. However, it does not start emerging from its over-wintering pupae until the days become long and warm – about the first of June. All aphids are active and may have reached high populations by then. This ensures the predator will have lots to eat and they will be very effective in bringing the pest under control, but again damage will probably have already occurred.



*Mature and immature aphids*

So what is an organic grower to do when one or more of the factors noted above results in a pest outbreak? Sometimes there are products available that are permitted. However, too often that is not the case. In regard to the aphids, in some areas and crops, soap sprays may have some effect. That is not the case in our area where low relative humidities and high water pHs result in the soaps causing considerable phytotoxicity and not being effective. Buying and introducing predators and parasites is another possible option but after many attempts, I am

not encouraged about this avenue. It makes you feel good that you did something but the results are usually far less than desired.

Five years ago we had another cool spring and subsequent outbreaks of pest aphids. The conventional growers began spraying the pesticides available for them. A number of local organic farmers (the type A personality ones) bought *Aphidoletes aphidomyza*. These are available for purchase from insectaries who rear them for greenhouses. I monitored blocks where they were released and ones where they were not. The survival rate of the released insects was abysmal. Once it warmed up, the blocks that did not receive releases recovered as quickly as those that did and did not have any more damage. When it was too cold for the naturally occurring *Aphidoletes* and all of the other predators and parasites from being effective, of

course it was too cold for any introduced insects to succeed as well. The only time when releases like this might actually increase numbers above naturally occurring ones is when most organic growers would never need them. I did some experiments once that showed introducing purchased predators in the summer into conventionally managed blocks to be effective where pesticides had killed all of the predators but not the aphids. However, organic farms will naturally produce more than you need as soon as weather conditions are suitable in most cases and further introductions in this period would not be worth it.

So what did I do about the rosy apple aphids attacking my apple trees this year? Nothing. There was nothing to do. For three weeks, I avoided looking at some of the worst attacked. Now I go and cheer on all of the predators and parasites fighting over the rapidly decreasing number of aphids. And wonder if it is physically possible to control the alternate host of this pest – plantain. . . . ✓

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## Food Sovereignty

by Cathleen Kneen

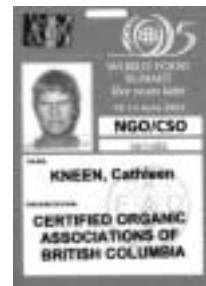
Attending an event like the World Food Summit in Rome in June, 2002, is an exercise in balancing contradictions. The “World Food Summit: *five years later*”, as it was called, was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and attended by official delegations from governments around the globe.

The first contradiction was in the attendance: while heads of state from a number of ‘developing’ countries attended, there were distressingly few senior representatives from the wealthy countries, who seem to prefer to meet in fora such as the G8 and G7.

Then there was the content: the documents circulated in preparation for the Summit managed to endorse both organic agriculture and genetic engineering. It seems that at these meetings the documents are written beforehand and the meetings themselves are opportunities for

speech-making. So at the Summit, under intense pressure from the USA, the final document stepped back from previous strong statements that food is a human right, though the concept remained. And, bowing to global trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO), mention of the potential of organic agriculture to address the scandal of hunger was framed in terms of the market demand in rich countries for organic food imported from poorer countries.

But the WFS:fyI was not the only conference in Rome that week. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and what are now called Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – that is, unions,



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women's groups, groups of peasants and fisher-folk, etc. – also held a Forum where the perspective, though far from unified, was at least coherent. I was accredited to represent COABC at both events, but spent nearly all my time at the NGO/CSO Forum on Food Sovereignty, although I went once to the FAO to take part in the “multi-stakeholder dialogue” where NGOs/CSOs presented our concerns directly to those official delegations who chose to attend (not all of them).

The NGO/CSO Forum started with a street demonstration, a march of 40,000 people (according to the police, who were pleasantly restrained; the only disruption was the constant presence of helicopters overhead which made it hard to talk to other marchers) under the banners of “Food Sovereignty”, “Hunger is not a problem of means, but of rights”, “No GMOs”, “Terminate the Terminator”, and many, many more. The march was led by La Via Campesina, an international coalition of peas-

ant and farmer groups (the National Farmers Union in Canada is a member) which had a very strong presence at the conference.

Perhaps because of the presence of so many peasants, farmers, and fishers at the NGO/CSO Forum, the spunky spirit of the march continued throughout the conference. As you can imagine, with more than a thousand people from all over the planet, each with their own experiences and perspectives, there was far more than I could possibly absorb, both workshops and materials from the many groups represented. I took some copies of the BC Organic Grower (which quickly disappeared) but came home with many times more paper than I arrived with.

For example: Chilean fishers were there to explain the effects on their ecology of industrial aquaculture which is contaminating the coast with antibiotics, endangering other fisheries, and requiring 3-5 pounds of deep-sea fish to

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produce one pound of salmon. They are also very worried about the advent of genetically engineered salmon, particularly because of the danger of escapes (they noted that about one-third of the river salmon in New Brunswick are escaped farmed salmon – perhaps less of a problem for N.B. since at least they are Atlantic salmon). Their concerns were echoed by fishers from India and Malaysia whose livelihoods are threatened by industrial overfishing and shrimp farming.

Mexican farmers were there to protest the contamination of corn in Oaxaca and Puebla states with GE corn – up to 15% near main roads – in the country which is the centre of origin of corn and where it has been regarded as sacred by traditional peoples. A Nicaraguan farmer described their discovery of GE corn and soy sent as food aid to Bolivia, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Peasant farmers from the Philippines and India explained the devastating effects of Green Revolution and GMO rice and cotton on their members and told us how, caught in the debt trap, farmers commit suicide by drinking the pesticides which were supposed to have lifted them out of poverty. They also described how peasant leaders are jailed and killed for leading protests.

Such stories made it easier to understand the militance which lies behind the slogans carried in the march and chanted at intervals throughout the plenary sessions in the Forum. While some of the NGOs have been working for years to move FAO and national governments to commit to the right to food and to adjust global

trade rules to allow access to rich country markets for poor country products, La Via Campesina (and many others) say simply: WTO out of agriculture! It is precisely the imposition of export-oriented agriculture (and fishery) which is starving their people, who find themselves working for wages which cannot buy enough food for their families (let alone school fees or other necessities) and unable to grow food for themselves. What is needed, all over the world, is a policy of Food Sovereignty, a concept that goes beyond the human right to food to include the ability of communities, peoples and nations to feed themselves as a first priority.

*From the Draft Plan of Action adopted by the final plenary of the Forum:* “Food sovereignty is a right of countries and peoples to define their own agricultural, pastoral, fisheries and food policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate. Food sovereignty promotes the Right to Food for the entire population, through small and medium-sized production, respecting: the cultures,



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diversity of peasants, pastoralists, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples and their innovation systems, their ways and means of production, distribution and marketing and their management of rural areas and landscapes. Women play a fundamental role in ensuring food sovereignty.”

Embedded in this concept is the recognition that organic farming, or “agroecological methods”, is key to food security. This does not, however, baptize the certified organic movement. In the IFOAM workshop – one of the most dynamic of the Forum – it was made clear that organic agriculture is not a ‘silver bullet’ that will solve hunger. Where organic agriculture is monoculture for export (eg. coffee) it is part of the problem, not the beginning of a solution. On the other hand, it is organic and traditional food production (farm and fish), largely by women, which is now feeding the world. India’s Vandana Shiva talked about how the imposition of dependency on purchased inputs and seeds and now GMOs (“the new Green Revolution”) is leading to the breakdown of this reality of food production at the village level. Famine, she said, is a lack of relationships. Organic farming based in biodiversity not only saves inputs but improves output – and resilience, which is especially important in a time of climate change. It opposes what she calls “technologies of carelessness” with a culture of care.

Throughout the week it was clear that there were two worlds. At the FAO, governments (with distressingly few heads of state from the wealthy countries) wrestled over whether or not the ‘human right to access to food’ is ‘justiciable’ – i.e. whether someone could sue a government for failing to provide it. At the NGO Forum, the discourse was about whether we should

endorse the right to food or food sovereignty. Finally I got up in the last plenary and said that the Canadians had been discussing this issue and that we see three different elements:

- the right to food (or food security, as we usually say here) means the right of a person to have assured access to nutritious, appropriate, safe food which is adequate to lead a healthy life;
- food sovereignty means that nations and peoples are able to define and control their own food systems, including land, water, biodiversity;
- food democracy means that communities, peoples and nations are able to exercise that control themselves in a democratic manner.

Food sovereignty, as we understand it after five days of debate, can include all of these.



*En route to the Forum*

A year ago, there was a conference in Toronto in preparation for the World Food Summit, organized by Mustafa Koc at Ryerson University under the heading of the Food Democracy Network. We examined Canada’s “Action Plan for Food Security” and came to the conclusion that Canada saw food security as strictly a problem for other (poor) countries. Coming from farm, anti-poverty and food action groups we knew that food security is a real problem for a growing number of Canadians, who have access to neither the resources to grow their food nor the money to buy it, nor the power to ensure that it is wholesome. So our slogan at the end of that conference was, “As in Rome, so at home”. The question I am left with, as I reflect on the whole experience of the past weeks, is: what can – and must –

we, as the organic community in B.C., do to work towards food sovereignty? The establishment of a vibrant organic production is only the first step.





# Glen Valley Organic Farm Co-Operative

*an interview with Susan Davidson*

Susan Davidson is an old hand at co-operatives, being a principal in Fraser Common Farm (and their business, Glorious Garnish and Seasonal Salad Company). She is also deeply committed to organic agriculture. So when Gregor and Amy Robertson decided to move and put their certified organic farm up for sale, she was interested to see what would become of it. After all, the farm is a 50 acre property on the Fraser River near Langley, with a fertile floodplain, established vegetable garden, heritage fruit orchard, deciduous forest, wetlands and uplands, along with a house, large hay barn and several outbuildings. When it became clear that the only potential buyer was a cranberry bog farmer, she became not just interested, but active.

A lot of wetlands in that area have already been bulldozed for cranberry growing, which, Susan explains, restructures floodplain into monoculture habitat by excavating about 3 feet down and building raised transportation avenues. When the berries are ripe, the blocks are flooded and the berries float to the surface and are skimmed off. Weed control is by herbicides. The result is the displacement and destruction of all the wetland species.

The thought of losing such a lovely farm to this fate got Susan on the telephone, trying to find a stable, large group of people willing to become shareholders in a co-operative enterprise. Fortunately, the Robertsons, also committed to organics, leased the land to the fledgling group, giving them a year to find financing.

Finding money was one problem; finding a farmer was another. Susan comments, "Farming skills are as endangered a species as farm land." But they did find John Switzer, the 'pioneer farmer' who is still on the farm, and who farmed the land along with Alyson Chisholm and Nyjal Brownson that first year. Meanwhile, shares were sold at \$5,000 each (shares are still available for anyone who is interested) and 5 of the sharers mortgaged their houses to get shareholder loans to cover the

shortfall. That got converted to a preferred loan from VanCity Credit Union, who also provided a \$20,000 grant to help market the shares, which was critical at that point.

Part of what we are trying to do with Glen Valley, explains Susan, was to stand on the shoulders of Fraser Common Farm, learning from the mistakes that have been made since Fraser Common was founded in 1977, and to further the experiment in both social reform and land justice. For example, while there is a multi-family dwelling at Fraser Common, at Glen Valley the 4 resident shareholders each has a separate [mobile] dwelling. As Susan puts it, they are not layering in the expectation of living communally into working cooperatively.

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“Sometimes we try to take it too far too fast,” she says. “It’s basically about being able to decompress because when you’re working that intensely it’s not a good process if you have to spend so much time and energy on maintaining your home scene. Of course,” she adds, “if there’s enough adversity you have no choice about living situations – we have the luxury of choice in this wealthy environment. We have the responsibility to situate ourselves where we can be the best we can be. It’s kind of an elite position to be able to look at things from that perspective, it is a privilege to be able to choose our domestic situation – which places on us the responsibility, in this case to preserve the land and farming skills for next generation. That is the momentum for Glen Valley.”

Another important element of Glen Valley is its co-operative process. Monthly meetings are celebrations, in the belief that if it isn’t fun, the group won’t last. They are run by a sophisticated form of consensus, designed to ensure that people who are uneasy with group processes have a voice. It is a process of decision-making

among diverse people who have shared values. Every participant has a red, a green, and a yellow card. If you want to contribute to the discussion, you hold up the green card, if you want to clarify you have yellow, and if this is way over the time line and not what you came here to discuss you use red – which takes priority. If you use a red card you are saying I am opposed to this – and I will help find another solution that will work for the group.

Susan concludes, “I see my grandsons’ faces when I’m at Glen Valley. It’s about creating learning opportunities, for them to eat nurturing food and protecting a place for them to farm should they choose. And it’s also as much about being part of a community, learning to cooperate; building resiliency which needs a larger base than the nuclear family can provide – inspired by and informed by the ecological resiliency on which our organic farming is based.” ✓

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# Horizontal Integration: the Reid family's farms

by Cathleen Kneen

Farming is in the Reids' blood. Their great-grandfather farmed on the Prairies, and their ancestors farmed back in Scotland. In this generation, 6 of Irving and Marion Reid's 8 children are farming, and four of them, Fred, Bradley, Rod, and Gregory work together in a dynamic collaboration which has enabled them to pioneer the development of organic poultry production in B.C.

Like all good organic production, the Reids' collaboration began with the soil – with compost, actually. They had all been involved in the hatching egg business, and by the mid-1980s were large, successful conventional operations. In-Season Farms, which involves Rod along with Fred and Gregory, started with composting chicken manures from the hatcheries. They got a small-scale bagger-sealer, did tons of analysis and studies – Rod's background in chemical engineering was helpful in this – and measured the pathogens in compost to see how fast they cooked out to establish a template for commercial production of organic compost.

In the early 1990s they started talking about conversion to organic. Fred had been growing vegetables organically since 1986, but the poultry was still conventional, as were Gregory's 16 acres of hazelnuts. By then there were a number of small growers with flocks of about 40 who were looking for organic feed. The Reids approached a number of conventional feed operations to ask for an organic line, but the degree of separation required meant building a separate side-facility, and no-one was willing to risk doing that. Believing that feed was the critical factor in building an organic poultry sector, in 1994 they decided to build a feed mill for organic feeds, with Rod, who had been very active in both BCARA and COABC as the chief operator. Initially a lot of the vegetable protein came from Omega Nutrition who had a plant just across the border in Bellingham – waste from their oil production – and the grain from organic grain producers in Peace River; now most

of their grain comes from Saskatchewan, and they import organic soy meal from South Dakota by the train-load.

Converting their own operations to organic was the next logical step. The conventional wisdom was that organics was a passing fad, and besides, you couldn't grow poultry organically, the breeds wouldn't handle it. "It's true," comments Fred. "When we started I was a big corporate farmer – I was a smoker, right? – and I questioned whether the birds would want to go outside because when you have birds in the barn and you open the door they don't want to go outside, they look at the sunlight and just back off."

Fred's first flock was 100 birds to see if they could weed the black currants, because they were secondary crop to raspberries and so got neglected. "Lo and behold," he says, "they did a wonderful job of weeding. Then I started fencing off raspberry land and putting the chickens in and began figuring out the timing. When all the eggs sold we got more birds, to meet the market as it grew."

Actually it was the raspberries that pushed Fred into converting. He had bought a 5-acre neighbouring property with conventional raspberries. The first year the buyer came requiring



*Organic chickens run free at Olera Farms*



that he spray 7 different sprays to kill weevils. Fred, who has a degree in agriculture, researched the issue, and realized that the problem was they were picking with machines at night and the weevils were coming out at night and so they were getting into the crop. He refused to use the sprays, and pulled out all the berries except for 3/4 acre. (Now he is up to about 6 acres.) "That," says Fred, "was the impetus for the conversion of all my land."

The conversion of all the poultry operations to organics was a real struggle, however, because the costs of organic poultry production are so much higher than conventional. The main issue is feed: not only is the organic feed more costly to produce, but without the antibiotics which are used in conventional production as growth stimulants, the birds grow more slowly, and feed costs as a whole are about double. Also, conventional farmers pack many more birds in a barn: 3/4 square feet per bird vs. 2 square feet in an organic barn. Then the big trucks are designed to take 10,000 birds and at the beginning the Reids had to cover trucking costs with only 500 birds at a time. The only way they survived financially was to sell their quota to cover the increased costs of production. As Fred puts it: "We sold one form of good will to build another form of good will. The point is to do something that has integrity."

By 1998 the brothers had specialized, with Bradley doing the chicken, Fred the eggs, and Gregory the pullets, both broilers and layers. But this is not the whole picture. Besides Gregory's hazelnuts, Fred's raspberries are a major crop, and they are integrated with the chickens. Their goal is to work independently and cooperatively. Brad comments: "There is strength in numbers, as a group we have more advantages, ideas, hands to work with – but we can maintain the independence which has been bred into us for generations. You have to give up a certain amount if you come into working together whether family or not."

"The important thing is," Brad adds, "this is a lifestyle conducive to raising children, a way of contributing – we can make a living on it and make the least footprint on the environment."

This is what the brothers really want to talk

about, working with the environment and enhancing it. For example, Brad and Fred have just started on a new farm. "The beaver pond is just beautiful," enthuses Fred. "Every property is different and has its own biological thumbprint and you have to recognize that but you have to generate revenue to survive. The organic movement allows you to do that without completely altering the ecology of a property. Anyone who thinks conventionally says, oh, they're easy to get rid of. We are not going to damage their current environment: we can coexist with the beavers, hey, we're Canadian!"

For his part, Fred is back full circle to little experiments in composting what he calls 'primal ooze' – and enjoying the cacophony of songbirds ("the opposite to silent spring," he says). He is hoping to develop a 'twinning' relationship with a community in Central America where the songbirds winter, sending farm kids there to work and learn a different culture. "I'd rather talk about the future," he concludes. "I want to get on to primal ooze and songbird habitat."



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# Organic Growers Introduce a New Apple Variety

by Linda Edwards

If you want a Gala apple tree (or any other variety), don't plant a seed from the fruit of that apple. It may very well become a tree that bears fruit that is quite different from the tree it originated on. This is because apples are open pollinated and each seed will have a different combination of genes and can be a different type of apple. It is just like the variation between children in a family. To get a Gala, you need to take a piece of wood with a bud from a Gala tree and graft it onto a rootstock. All named varieties are essentially clones.

There are two ways a new variety of apple comes into being. Some are planned crosses carried out in nurseries and research stations. Spartans, Gala, Sunrise and JonaGolds are examples. Others are chance seedlings. These are ones that grow from a seed of uncertain parentage. The majority of these are not usual-

ly desirable trees for one reason or another. However, Braeburn, Goldens, Macs, and Red Delicious are examples of varieties that originated from a chance seedling.

About a dozen years ago, a chance seedling grew in an orchard in the Similkameen Valley where Red and Golden Delicious had grown but



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had been removed. JonaGolds were replanted at the site. Fortunately for the seedling it was in a tree row and was allowed to grow until it started to produce fruit. And what a wonderful fruit it was! It had the shape of a Red Delicious but was bicolored - a bright red and yellow. It was crisp and sweet and juicy and very slow to turn brown...a wonderful, unique apple. The owners of the apple, Wilfrid and Sally Mennell, aptly named it Ambrosia.

Now it is one thing to grow something different, even something superior to many other varieties, but quite another to market it and make it a commercial variety. In the conventional market, handling small quantities of fruit - especially unknown fruit - is not seen as a viable option. However, organic markets are more flexible and innovative and more willing to handle a few boxes of this and a few boxes of that. Therefore it is not surprising that although the mother tree was in a conventional

orchard, it was an organic grower who saw its potential, took some bud wood and planted the first block of Ambrosia clones. Within a year another organic grower followed suit and there were soon enough trees to produce marketable amounts of fruit. These organic growers did promotional work through organic brokers. Things like store demos (giving people slices of the apples to taste) confirmed that this was an apple consumers really liked. Almost immediately demand exceeded supply. More Ambrosia trees were planted in organic orchards and the market grew accordingly.

Over the next few years, other growers, both conventional and organic, came to see the trees and went away convinced that this apple was a winner. It is now the most widely planted variety in BC and is much sought after world wide by growers.



Last year, Ambrosia growers in the conventional tree fruit industry applied to the provincial government for establishment of a development council under the Farming and Fisheries Industries Development Act to develop quality standards and promote new varieties beginning with Ambrosia apple. They then arranged to have a formal plebiscite held (which was successful) to legitimize the collection of a levy of \$1/box for every box sold to be used carry out these goals. The motion authorizing the levy recognized that organic products and markets were unique and that any money collected from organic producers should be used by them in their own distinctive market strategies. A representative of the organic community sits on the council and all are pleased with the degree of harmony and information sharing which is occurring.

It is recognized that without the flexibility and innovativeness of the organic producers and the market place that this wonderful apple would probably never have been anything more than one of the many chance seedlings enjoyed only by those who own it.

And what about the Ambrosia mother tree? Although it began its life on conventional land, the Mennells have now converted that land and the trees on it to certified organic !





# Conservation Tillage and Organic Farming

By Av Singh

In recent years conservation tillage practices have gained prominence among producers wanting to address environmental concerns such as wind and water erosion, nutrient leaching, loss of organic matter, and reduced biological diversity. More and more of these low-till and no-till technologies have become centred on the use of herbicides – leaving organic farmers out of the picture. Indeed, many believe that the principle to not use herbicides has left organic crop production “forever shackled to clean cultivation” and go on to characterize organic farming as erosive and environmentally destructive because of its perceived reliance on excessive tillage for weed control. These are myths. Organic farmers have and continue to be pioneers in conservation tillage.

Long-before the term conservation tillage was coined, many organic farmers put to rest their moldboard plows in favour of the chisel plow. Chisel plowing is a form of mulch tillage, in which residues are mixed in the upper layers of the soil, leaving significant residue on the surface to reduce erosion. The creation of highly specialized cultivators and planters, designed to work in heavy crop residues, gave rise to ridge tillage technology. Ridge tillage is characterized by the maintenance of permanent ridge beds across the entire field and has widespread adoption by those producing row crops like corn, soybeans, cotton, and sunflower.

Nowhere is it more evident that organic farmer innovations are leading the way in conservation tillage than when we look at mulch systems. Advances in cover crop research have permitted organic producers to experiment with both living and killed mulches as a form of weed suppression. A killed mulch system has evolved, centred on the concept of growing a dense cover crop, killing it, and planting into the residue. The dense biomass provided by the killed cover crop not only protects and builds the soil, it

also provides substantial weed suppression by occupying niches, making them unavailable for weed invasion, and by out-competing weeds for light and nutrients.

Mulches are used in conventional farming systems for similar benefits, but herbicides are the primary tools used in killing the cover crops. In contrast, organic producers favour mechanical technologies or use weather stress to weaken cover crops. Mowing, undercutting, and rolling are popular mechanical choices among many organic farmers. Often a more economical way

to kill the cover crop is by letting Mother Nature do the work for you. Cover crops such as millet, buckwheat, berseem clover, alfalfa (fall dormancy > 7), and annual medic will be reliably killed by winter temperatures leaving a dense mulch that can be planted into the following spring.

Living mulches represent another alternative in reducing tillage in organic systems. In this article,

I am differentiating between inter-seeding and seeding into a living mulch. In inter-seeding, two species are planted at the same time – one a low-growing smother crop to suppress weeds and reduce erosion, while the other species is the cash crop. In living mulch systems the cash crop is established into an existing cover crop (e.g., white and kura clover, canola, perennial ryegrass), that remains living for all or part of the growing season and perhaps perennially. Successful living mulch systems must manage a balance between weed suppression and competition with the cash crop for light, water, and nutrients.

Making conservation tillage work in organic systems is no cookie-cutter recipe. Many of the approaches are not generically “field-ready” and will require significant research to ensure more widespread adoption. The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada will be initiating research this summer on various cover crops, intended as green manures, but which through their man-

The conventional view of a good looking field may be one that is plowed and manicured, while in zero-till farming a “good looking field” is one that is unplowed with stubble on it. “But not only do you have to get your mind around that, you also have to deal with your neighbors who haven’t got their minds around it. You have to put up with comments like, ‘Man your summer fallow sure looks like hell.’” – Keith Head, Saskatchewan

agement may serve an additional benefit of suppressing weeds.

Organic conservation tillage systems have had a long history, but at the same time are in their infancy. Innovative strategies have and will continue to be part and parcel of organic agriculture. Many of the existing technologies are still somewhat reliant on cultivation to manage weeds, but even as such, these somewhat imperfect systems are still contributing greatly to the sustainability of organic agriculture and should be pursued by both producers and researchers.

*Av Singh, Ph.D, Extension Coordinator, Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, ph (902) 893-6275 or email [asingh@nsac.ns.ca](mailto:asingh@nsac.ns.ca)* ✓



*Chisel plow on quackgrass at Dragon Mountain Farm*

## **The War against Weeds Part 2**

*by Paddy Doherty*

Burdock, Canada Thistle and Quackgrass are the “axis of evil” on my farm. Of the three, the fundamentalist quackgrass is most despicable, cowardly and pervasive – clearly the “Al Queda” of the weed world. As with all unwelcome infiltrators, it must be weeded out wherever it is found.

My latest anti-quackgrass project involved following a garden area for an entire season. This area has been an alfalfa hayfield, heavily infested with quackgrass. It was ploughed and disced lightly, then left to sit for the sod to rot (this is best done in the fall). I had to keep the weeds down, but it was important not to dig up the ploughed sod before it had sufficiently rotted.

Once the sod had a chance to break down (in the summer, 5 weeks) I used a chisel plough to drag the quackgrass roots to the surface where they could dry out and die. I kept this up at 3-week intervals throughout the growing season, the last pass being well after the first fall frost.

It was a rainy summer, but the exposed roots died nonetheless.

The result was a perfectly clean seedbed this spring. The quackgrass has been virtually eliminated, along with any annual weeds that happened to sprout last season. The annual weeds will definitely return, but with constant and persistent cultivation, the quackgrass should remain under control. The chisel plough works well for this purpose as it drags the quackgrass roots up from the plough depth, where they are waiting and gathering strength for re-emergence. It doesn't work just to disc and harrow (not as well, anyway) as the roots are still biding their time down below, even if you are keeping the grass from growing above.

I'll continue this practice on different areas of the garden. I'd like to have enough space to fallow a large area every summer, to be fertilised and planted again next season. In the long term, a crop rotation including a good annual green manure crop, would be optimum. ✓

**Burdock,  
Canada  
Thistle and  
Quackgrass are  
the “axis of evil”  
on my farm.**

# On-Farm Food Safety Pilot Project

by Linda Edwards

Food safety has become a critical issue in the produce industry. While the incidence of food-borne illnesses in Canada from Canadian-grown produce is low, there have been notable exceptions. In the 2001 growing season, a serious outbreak of food poisoning (caused by the bacteria *Shigella*) was traced to BC grown spinach. More than 36 people were treated for gastrointestinal illness because contaminated water was used to rinse the spinach prior to cooling and shipping. This incident destroyed the BC spinach market during the peak of the season, and badly affected other sectors of the local fresh produce industry.

In the spring of 2002, Capers, a food retail store and deli/restaurant in Vancouver which sells a great deal of organic produce and grocery items, was at the centre of a Hepatitis A outbreak as a result of an infected food han-

dlar. While this was not a farm-related incident, nor was it directly related to organics, there was a perception that organics were involved because of the company's high profile. This certainly served to raise awareness of the importance of taking all reasonable precautions when it comes to consumer health and food safety. Organic foods enjoy consumer confidence as safe and wholesome, and we must ensure that confidence is warranted.

The COABC has undertaken a pilot project with the BCMAFF to evaluate on-farm food safety on organic farms, and to ensure the quality and safety of BC organic produce. To do this, the COABC will review existing "Microbial Food Safety Checklists" published for vegetable and tree fruit growers and determine where the checklists can complement the existing organic standards; there will also be on-farm food safe-



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ty visits for a selected group of vegetable and tree fruit growers. This will help us determine what current food safety practices are, and what changes might be required for the future. For example, we may wish to put on training courses on specific food safety topics, or incorporate some of the checklist requirements in our organic farm management standards.

A food safety consultant will be hired by the province to carry out a side-by-side review of the BC organic "Farm Management Standards" and the two "Microbial Food Safety Checklists." This will include a review of both production and on-farm packing checklists. Two other consultants with knowledge of organic certification standards and experience in conducting inspections will be contracted to conduct the on-farm visits. If they do not previously have food safety training, the food safety consultant will provide one or two days of intensive training. They will also work with the food safety consultant during the checklist review to advise him/her of organic farming practices.

The on-farm consultants will sign a confidentiality agreement, as they do when they conduct the organic certification visits. They will visit 20 field vegetable growers and 20 tree fruit growers in the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan/Interior in the summer and fall of 2002. A report will be written for each farm, with recommendations for improving food safety practices if required. The farms will be selected on the advice of the COABC and will include farms which conduct washing and grading activities.

The project will be supervised by the COABC steering committee and Kathleen Zimmerman of the BCMAFF Food Safety and Quality Branch. The steering committee will participate in developing the criteria for selection of the farms, and will have input into the selection of the on-farm consultants. The steering committee will also work with the food safety consultant in the review of the organic standards and the food safety checklists. A report of the results, with any identifying farm information removed, will be provided to the COABC. A food safety checklist that complements the organic management standards will be developed and tested.

With this project, the BC organic industry will

demonstrate to buyers and the general public that we are working proactively on the important issue of food safety. By including a food safety component in their grower verification, the organic sector will show our ability to adapt to changing market demands and emerging business requirements. We will also be exercising due diligence in further protecting the health of consumers.



## Positions Available

### Farm Food Safety Survey

Two part time positions are available to carry out on-farm food safety checks between the months of July and September. These will be done in the Okanagan/Interior and in the Fraser Valley. Experience in carrying out farm inspections and knowledge of organic certification standards is required. Knowledge of either vegetable or tree fruit production would be an asset. Training in food safety assessment will be provided.

#### Application deadline: July 4

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# Upcoming Events

## European Union Exporting Information Session: Organic Foods

August 15, 2002 • 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Room 214 International Trade Centre,  
300 West Georgia St, Vancouver (Library  
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Cost \$40.00 (organic lunch included)

The Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (DFAIT) are planning to hold an information session for BC exporters and potential exporters of organic food products. If you are interested in finding out if there is a market for your products in the European Union, join us and put your questions to resource people & organic food importers from Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

For more information please contact Coreen Moroziuk, Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada at 604-666-2861 or moroziukc@agr.gc.ca



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# Technology Project Funded

by Rochelle Eisen

On June 20th, politicians, press, organic producers and members of the public gathered in the boardroom of BCMAFF Kelowna to hear Senator Fitzpatrick announced the Government of Canada's financial commitment to COABC's Rural Capacity Building Through Organic Agriculture project. The Office of Learning Technologies of Human Resources Development of Canada is providing approximately \$190,000 (of a total budget of \$400,000) over a two-year period to the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC) to spearhead this project.

The tone of the event was set by Linda Edwards, COABC President, as she expressed COABC's enthusiasm and hopes for this project, and ensured that all the project partners were duly appreciated. The goal, she said, is that BC farmers have the tools to adapt to the new economy. Bill Bidlake, the Principal of Summerland Secondary School, spoke about his pride in the work being done by Summerland Secondary work experience students who are helping to develop the Information Technology Farmer training tools necessary to make this project a success. Regional Director Terry Dever, representing the Interior Region of the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, reiterated the ministry's commitment to this project as the ministry is a strong supporter of using electronic technology to improve access to information for the Ministry's clients. Senator Fitzpatrick spoke about how this project not only encourages life-long learning, but also encourages farmers to adapt to the new economy and said the Government of Canada is proud to support a project that can bring life to rural communities and encourage rural

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business development through learning technologies.

While all this was happening, the four project contractors (Joanne Warren, Tracy Schimpf, Natalie Minunzie and Julia Jamieson) who were selected to serve the Rural Capacity Building Through Organic Agriculture Project as Infobasket Website Content Reviewers, were trained by BCMAFF staff members Laura Reid and George Geldart on the intricacies of the Organic Infobasket Community. This 'virtual

community', located at <http://infobasket.gov.bc.ca/Infoman/communities/community.asp?UserID=2&>,

links users to information sources from around the world, including governments, universities and research institutes. The new content reviewers will help guide the Infobasket search engine to better information sources as they become available, while simultaneously cleaning out the storage system of dated information.

By the end of the training day, each trainee did appear to have a blank look on her face as they headed down the highway to their respective homes. Hopefully each is well on the way to recovery by now and have started the organic content review process.

All BC farmers can profit directly from this project, as the key objective is to increase organic resources on-line while improving producers' Internet skills. A well-informed farmer can grow an enhanced assortment of market-desired crops, hence increasing profitability, building healthier communities and boosting the presence of BC grown product in the marketplace.





# More Potato Problems

By Paddy Doherty



## Hollow Heart

These are small or large cavities inside the mature potato. Hollow heart tends to favour very large potatoes. This occurs when the potato grows faster than it's supposed to. Poor tuber set may be the reason - the plant's energy is directed to a few large fruit, instead of many smaller ones. Too much space between the plants may another reason.

### Control

To avoid hollow heart, plant your potatoes with the recommended spacing to ensure uniform growth. Planting large seed may also help avoid hollow heart by securing a vigorous tuber set, although this is not always practical with mechanical planting equipment. Provide irrigation during the two-week period after the shoots first appear (tuber-set), but avoid very wet soil while the fruit is growing (if possible).

## Growth Cracks



Fully callused fissures in mature potatoes often develop in periods of rapid growth after a dry spell. Uniform irrigation may help to control this problem.

## Wireworm



Wireworms feed on potatoes, beans, beets, carrots, celery, corn, lettuce, onion, sweet potatoes, and turnips. They are thin, tough-skinned white or yellow worms with a dark head and dark tail sections - 1/2 inch to 1 1/2 inch long. The larvae damage potatoes by tunnelling into them leaving small round holes on the surface. These holes confirm wireworm damage.

The adults are called click beetles, because of the way they snap their bodies with an audible click. Click beetles are thin and less than an inch long, brown to black in colour. Adult beetles spend the winter in the soil and in spring travel a short distance to lay their eggs. The larvae may feed for as many as six years before they pupate.

### Control

Avoid planting potatoes after permanent grass. In fact, it is suggested you wait three or four years before planting after pasture or forage crops.

## Stem canker and Black Scurf (*rhizoctonia solani*)

Potato growers recognise the symptom of *rhizoctonia solani* as black tarry patches (black sclerotia) on mature potatoes. These are easily removed with a thumbnail. Early in the season

emerging sprouts may be attacked and later the base of the stem. This may result in delayed development of the crop. Except for first early crops, this does not result in serious losses. The main economic effect is from the black scurf on potatoes, which detracts from their appearance.

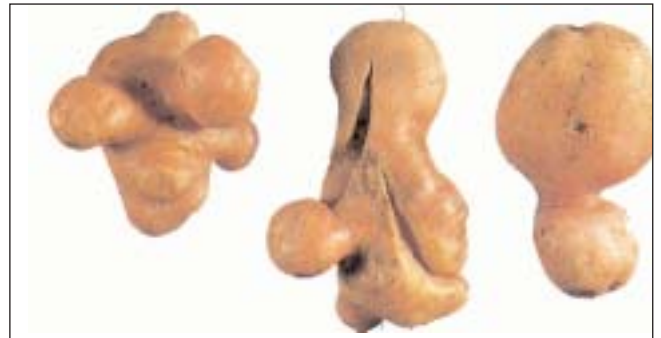
Rhizoctonia is seed and soil borne and is more frequent on light soils under dry cold conditions.

### Control

There are no resistant varieties. Plant warm seed in warm soil. Avoid early planting in cold conditions. Avoid heavily infected seed. Use a long rotation for your potato crop.



### Second Growth



Some people call this “knobbly potatoes” (they are called rude potatoes in the UK) because of the excessive protuberances at the eyes. Second growth often occurs during good weather conditions – wet weather especially following dry conditions. Uniform irrigation may help to control this problem. ✓



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# Urban Organic Gardening Standard

by Heide Hermary

SOUL, the Society of Organic Urban Land Care Professionals was founded to provide the urban public with a source of professionals who have the knowledge and credentials to practice organic land care. This involves many new initiatives:

- the development of organic standards for ornamental landscapes
- the development of a certification program for urban land care professionals
- the development of training programs for organic horticulture

Organic standards for urban environments present many challenges due to the perennial nature and unnatural plant combinations of ornamental landscapes. Urban gardens also tend to contain more elaborate hardscapes and shared structures, such as fences, where the homeowner does not have control over the choice of materials. Organic seed and plant material are simply not available. Many city gardens are too small for proper composting, with composting prohibited altogether in many strata developments, creating a reliance on commercial products of unknown origin. We've only just begun to unravel the complexities. We originally hoped to have standards developed in time for the IFOAM conference, but now feel that we need more time and will tackle this as a winter project.

We are considerably closer to visualizing a certification program for urban land care professionals and urban landscapes. This dual certification process is a major departure from the certification of organic farms, where only the land is certified, not the farmer. But in

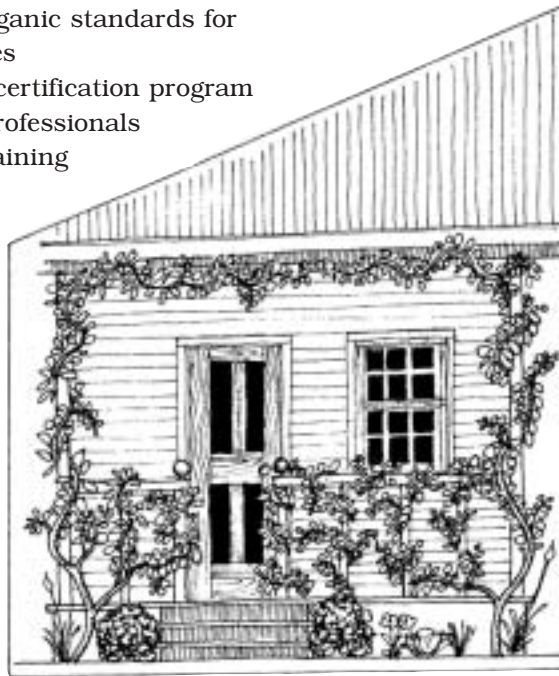
most cases landscapers do not have control over the land they work on. Instead the public requires assurance that the professional they hire does indeed have the knowledge and credentials to practice organic horticulture.

Consequently the certification of organic land care personnel must be predominantly knowledge and experience based. There will, however, be the additional need for the organic certification of specific sites such as parks, golf courses, nurseries, etc., which require a land-based inspection similar to that in organic agriculture, as well as the presence of certified staff.

In support of the knowledge requirement for the organic certification of urban land care professionals a very in-depth training course is being developed, which will be available via the internet starting September, 2002. Information on the course content can be found at <[www.organic-land-care.com](http://www.organic-land-care.com)>, although the site

has not yet been updated to provide the starting date and cost of the internet version. While the internet may not be the ideal vehicle to teach organic horticulture, the course is geared towards professionals and gardeners who already have some basic practical skills. We also found that, while there is much interest for this course from all across the world, and several teaching institutions have expressed an interest to offer the course, students are presently located too far apart to present a classroom version.


For more information, contact <[heidehermary@pacificcoast.net](mailto:heidehermary@pacificcoast.net)>, phone (250) 853-6802



Picture from *Introduction to Permaculture*, by Bill Mollison with Remy Mia Slay







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# ***IFOAM 2002: Technical Info and Lively Debate***

COABC is proud to be a Bronze Level sponsor of the IFOAM conference. This means that we've made a financial and volunteer commitment to the conference as a whole. In addition, some of us are participating as speakers, some of us are participating as exhibitors, and COABC has a booth at the Organic World Exhibition which showcases the variety and quality of certified organic production in BC. Products of COABC members will be for sale at the booth, in addition to free information material and displays on individual farms and processors. Visitors to the Organic World Exhibition are invited to come to the COABC booth and sample our delicious and exciting wares.

## ***Programme***

The IFOAM congress will provide technical production information, but will also air disparate views from around the world on controversial issues we all face in production, marketing and social relations.

A staggeringly rich menu of workshops over the three days of the congress will be organized into three 'meals':

### ***Organic Production and Environmental Responsibilities Redesigning Food Systems***

#### ***People and the Process of Change***

Each of these themes will be introduced by a panel representing an international variety of perspectives, with speakers from Cambodia, the Philippines, Nicaragua, Benin, USA, Argentina, Netherlands, Brazil, and of course Canada. The workshops, also reflecting an international roster of presenters, will cover technical issues in areas such as Crop Production (including soil management), Pest and Disease Control, Seed Production and Conservation, Animal Husbandry, and Farming Systems. There will also be session on Marketing and Trade, Policy Development, Education and Training, Rural Development, and of course Certification and Standards.

B.C. is also well represented with speakers such as Herman and Louise Bruns (moveable

greenhouses and CSAs respectively), Diane Chown & Tina Fraser (Linking Land and Future Farmers), Thomas Lowery (wine), Lee Macfayden (The Land Conservancy), and Brewster Kneen (genetic engineering), to mention only a few.

This is not a comprehensive list! The full program will be available as it is finalized on the Congress website. ✓

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## ***Organic Farmer Survey***

Why do farmers choose to farm organically? Is organic farming becoming "mainstream"? A survey of organic farmers is currently under way in British Columbia to try to answer questions like these. The goal of this survey is to study the evolution of the organic market over the past decade in British Columbia. A survey of consumers is also planned for later this year.

The phone interviews of BC certified organic farmers are being completed over the summer. The data will be analysed during the fall 2002 by Thomas du Payrat, a PhD candidate in the Department of Economics at Simon Fraser University. Upon completion of the research, results will be shared with COABC and the certifying agencies operating in British Columbia. They will also be available to everyone on the Internet.

Every certified organic farmer from BC is encouraged to participate and have their voice heard. The survey is strictly confidential and anonymous.

For more information please contact Thomas du Payrat at [tdupayra@sfu.ca](mailto:tdupayra@sfu.ca) or 604-291-3880, or check [www.sfu.ca/~tdupayra/organic](http://www.sfu.ca/~tdupayra/organic). ✓

## Brand Name Product Directory Available

One of the most frequent questions asked of the COABC office is "What products can I use on my organic farm?" The Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia is attempting to answer this question by providing the COABC Brand Name Product Directory. The Directory is now available on the COABC website in PDF format at [www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca](http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca).

The Directory has been developed from the OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) list to which the COABC subscribes. COABC licensees pay an annual fee for the OMRI subscription. This gives the COABC access to a professional, impartial, and internationally recognised evaluation service for products used in organic farming and processing. Companies that wish to have their products approved for use in organic production pay a fee to OMRI for this service. The OMRI list of evaluated products, complete with annotations, is then provided to the COABC.

The COABC hired a contractor to review the OMRI list with respect to Canadian regulations. Many products that are allowed for use in the US are not registered for use in Canada. These are prohibited for use in the BC Certified Organic Program until they are registered for use in Canada.

The Directory is not all-inclusive. Some product manufacturers have not had their products evaluated by OMRI. These products are missing from the list. However, many companies are interested in having their products "approved for use" in organic production so are looking to OMRI for a simple and inexpensive way of achieving this. Over time, the OMRI list will come to include more Canadian products.

In the meantime, organic farmers who are using non-reviewed products should satisfy themselves that all of the ingredients, including the adjuvants, fillers or carriers, which are often not identified on the labels, are listed as allowed substances in the COABC Materials Lists. COABC Generic Materials Lists for Crops, Processing, and Livestock are available in the

BC Certified Organic Management Standards on the COABC website or from the COABC office.

For farmers and processors exporting to the US, another complication is the implementation of the US National Organic Program (NOP) which may require them to make substantial changes. OMRI has announced that it is working with growers, ranchers, processors and certifiers in the US and internationally to help make the new US regulations less daunting by issuing its latest editions of the OMRI Generic Materials List and the OMRI Brand Name Products List. Together, the lists include the most recent updates and detailed information available in the organic industry for growers, ranchers and processors on organic ingredients, farm inputs, and numerous other supply-chain regulations. ✓



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# Industrial Organics

adapted from *The Ram's Horn* #202

The growth in the market for organic foods has not escaped the notice of the major food manufacturers. Did you know that, for example, it is food giant General Mills that makes the breakfast cereals which appear under the brand name Cascadian Farm? Then there is "Mother's" breakfast cereal – made by PepsiCo's Quaker Oats unit.

The Wall Street Journal reports: "For the purveyor of Cheerios to keep its legendary logo off of a cereal box defies all conventional marketing wisdom. But these new cereals aren't aimed at the conventional market. They're organic, and organic-food buyers tend to eschew conglomerates' famous brands. Catering to the organic market suddenly is the rage of the nation's growth-starved food conglomerates. While sales at their traditional outlets – supermarkets – are growing barely more than 1% a year, sales at so-called natural-foods retailers are rising at several times that rate."

The strategy is similar to that used by the big movie studios, which responded to the art-film craze by buying up independent studios. The list of recent acquisitions is lengthy: Coca-Cola Co. last year bought natural juice maker Odwalla. In 2000, Kraft bought Balance Bar Co. and Boca Burger and Kellogg bought natural cereal maker Kashi Co. In 1999 H.J. Heinz Co. bought a 19.5% stake in Hain Food Group Inc., and a year later General Mills bought Small Planet Foods Co., owner of the well-known Cascadian Farm brand. Hain and Cascadian make all sorts of natural-foods products.

And then there's beer. In the high-end world of craft beers, big conglomerates have tried to pass as funky shoe-string microbrewers to appeal to discerning consumers. Red Dog beer, for instance, says it's made by Plank Road Brewery, but it's really made by No. 2 beer heavyweight Miller Brewing Co., a unit of Philip Morris. Then there is Kootenay Black Lager and Kootenay Mountain Ale in BC, both of which are brewed by Labatts, although you won't find their name anywhere on the labels.

There has been an on-going discussion in the organic community as to whether or not organic junk-food should be allowed under the organic umbrella. On one side are the purists who believe that the term 'organic' should correspond with 'wholesome' – meaning that in addition to a holistic approach to production, the food is minimally processed and packaged – and preferably consumed close to where it is produced. On the other side are those who argue that it is better for the Earth to have junk foods produced using organic methods than using harmful chemicals. They assume that the North American addiction to sugar-fat-salt is not going to be overcome any time soon.

Certainly the big food manufacturers (that's a contradiction in terms for some of us) are moving rapidly, not only to buy up organic processors but to create their own organic lines. The best-publicized is H.J. Heinz which is developing a Heinz-made organic ketchup. Another giant, PepsiCo's Frito-Lay unit, is test-marketing several brands of natural and organic versions of existing snacks, including Cheetos, Tostitos and Sun Chips, labelled as being from Frito-Lay.

The major markets for such products are Whole Foods and Wild Oats (owners of Capers in B.C.). For example, when General Mills produced an organic cereal called Sunrise, its taste didn't impress Whole Foods or Wild Oats, which devoted little shelf space to it. General Mills officials also concluded that its reputation meant less to natural-foods customers than a brand known to be organic. "To the organic

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customer, the heritage of Cascadian Farms has more equity” than the image of General Mills, says Marc Belton, a Mills senior vice president. So the new cereals make no connection to General Mills, even though one of them – Honey Nut O’s – is essentially just an organic version of Honey Nut Cheerios. The two products look the same, and their advertised descriptions are nearly identical: “Whole grain oat cereal touched with golden honey and almonds.”

Although General Mills dropped its name from cereal boxes, Whole Foods said it plans, with General Mills’ approval, to post a sign above the Cascadian Farm cereal that reads, “Cascadian Farm, one of the original producers of organic foods in this country, is now part of the General Mills family.”

Meanwhile, the American Corn Growers Association (ACGA) has warned farmers that General Mills’ move into organics will be a major setback to the future marketing of genetically modified (GMO) grains. ✓



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## Classifieds

**THE REAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The Construction of Biotechnology Policy in Canada, 1980-2002**, by Devlin Kuyek, published by The Ram’s Horn. In meticulous detail, this study describes who has actually been making the decisions about biotechnology – indeed, about health policy, science policy, and much more – for the past two decades. It is a devastating picture, and required reading if you are interested in affecting Canadian policy. The whole document is available in pdf format at [www.ramshorn.bc.ca](http://www.ramshorn.bc.ca), or it can be ordered for \$13, postpaid, from The Ram’s Horn, S-6, C-27, RR #1, Sorrento BC, V0E 2W0.

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