

BC Organic Grower

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*British
Columbia
Certified
Organic*



**Small Grower Certification
On Solid Ground:
restructuring COABC**

**Pro Organics in the Limelight
Inventions**

**When Organics Go
Mainstream**

A Fairy Story

The Organic Prison Farm

**Cover Crops for Soil
Improvement**

**Opportunity for Input on Supply
Management**

**Organic Seed Regulations
Tighten**

SRC Studies Aquaculture Deeply

New Perspectives

Criteria to Consider

**Mandatory, Affordable–
National**

Science Notes

100,000 Slices of Apple

**COABC, #8A, 100 Kalamalka Lake Rd.
Vernon BC V1T 9G1**

Small Grower Certification

by Patrick Mallet

Sixty-nine percent of COABC licensees gross under \$20,000 a year. That was the figure that jumped out at me as I read a report that COABC commissioned recently. The report provided background information for the COABC Board of Directors to explore ways to get the association on more sound footings. The figure was taken from a tabulation of 2003 membership fees paid to COABC by licensees. What that figure means is that we are a farming community dominated by small producers. At these levels of income, it is undoubtedly the case that many farmers are having to subsidize their income from off-farm sources in order to create a decent livelihood. The cost of certification is increasingly a point of contention for these small farmers.

At the outset of the organic movement in British Columbia, farmers got together and developed standards that they used to certify each other's practices. This grew slowly into a network of regional certification bodies that were run on a volunteer basis by the participating farmers. When this network was formalized into a provincial association (COABC), the standard became part of the provincial legislation and an accreditation program was developed to ensure that the certifiers were operating consistently and credibly. In the last few years, a couple of certification bodies have begun to operate according to international guidelines. For the most part, this means that certification decisions are separated at arm's length from the farmers who are seeking certification. This has become necessary for those producers who want to export their product to the US and other markets outside BC. Soon, a national regulation will be in place in Canada that will regulate the use of the term 'organic'. This is an important and positive development because it ensures that all products being sold as organic in Canada meet the same basic standards for organic production. It also eases the ability of Canadian producers to export to other jurisdictions.

There are, no doubt, good reasons for each of these developments. As farmers become further and further separated from their customers and organic food travels back and forth across borders, there is an increasing need for consistency

and compatibility between standards and in the certification process.

Unfortunately these developments almost always come with an increase in the cost of certification. Which is fine if you need that external recognition to sell your product internationally or into the major supermarket chains, but not so great if you are part of the majority of producers within COABC who sell their products direct to the consumer: at the farm gate, through CSAs and farmer's markets and to restaurants. The question these members are asking is how to guarantee the integrity of their products through certification without suffering unnecessary and costly regulatory requirements?

I have to qualify this simplification of the organic certification process at this point by noting that small producers within COABC are among the most advantaged in the international organic community. Even with all the complaints about rising costs and unnecessary bureaucracy, certification fees in BC remain among the lowest in the world. Local certification bodies still rely in large part on the goodwill and commitment of member volunteers to keep these costs within reason. And fees to COABC have been nominal considering the range of services that the organization provides. Again, this is only the case because of the depth of committed volunteers and staff who oversee the accreditation and standards development functions, and because of the continued support of the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

Having said that, when your income is marginal, the cost of certification becomes a significant factor to consider. It was this issue that dominated discussions during a weekend Board retreat in late November. The financial situation facing our organization is not pretty. Those com-



parably low fees being charged by COABC to licensees do not meet the minimum operating costs of the organization. And that's even with the enormous volunteer commitment and a skeletal staff. The member fees submitted to COABC cover only about two thirds of the costs of basic staff and office operating costs. We make up the difference in money earned from externally funded projects and public events like the AGM workshops. This is a short-term solution. At this retreat, the Board was concerned with the long-term sustainability of the organization and, more importantly, of organic agriculture in BC.

Luckily, the folks sitting around that table have a wealth of experience and insight that can only be gleaned from many years of commitment to the growth of the organic movement in BC. There was a common understanding of the financial burdens already faced by small producers and a desire to find other solutions to the inevitable rise in membership fees. The Board members did not come up with any silver bullets or easy answers, but we did explore a number of interesting proposals that deserve to be examined more closely.

In the Canadian context, discussions about how to create a regulatory framework that doesn't discriminate against small producers are still in their early stages. We have an opportunity to influence this discussion and ensure that local organic farmers are not regulated out of business. In the United States, there is an exemption from certification for farmers who gross less than US\$5,000 per year. This minimum gross income exemption isn't an optimal solution. There are inherent problems in using income level as a criterion; also, many small farmers seek or require the recognition that comes with certification.

One option that is relatively untested in North America is grower group certification. This model, sometimes referred to simply as group certification, has its origins in developing countries where commodity producers often each farm less than half an acre. The only way that they can afford certification is by linking up with their neighbours to create a cohesive group. This group works collaboratively to ensure each one of its members is in compliance with the standards. An external certifier then assesses the group as a whole, including their procedures for internal control. Only a small percentage of the farmers in the group are inspected each year by the external certifier. This approach significantly reduces the costs of certification for each individual grower.

The IFOAM position on group certification notes that group certification systems have the following aspects in common:

continued on page 3...

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Cover Photo: Robert Hettler models his planter (see pages 8-9). Photo by Kathryn Hettler

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...continued from page 2

- A central body responsible for marketing and the group's compliance to applicable standards. (buyer, processor, or self organized cooperative/association).
- One single certification for all individual production as well as processing and handling activities registered within the group. Individual operators within the group may not use the certification independently.
- Group members operate under contractual or binding membership requirements specifying the commitment to comply with applicable organic standards and permit inspection, etc.
- Presence of an internal control system (ICS), operated by the responsible central body or an external body contracted by the central body. The ICS normally maintains files on all members of the group and inspects each member's operation at least once a year.
- A list of all individual member producers is available.
- The Group, through the ICS mechanism, decides on members' compliance to applicable standards. Non-compliances are dealt with according to set procedures and sanctions. Measures to handle appeals and complaints are also in place for some groups.

In the Canadian context, there are a couple of issues that need to be explored further. Grower groups usually market their products as a single entity. This is relatively easy in commodity production, but doesn't translate so well into the BC farm context. We will need to see whether group certification can be separated from common marketing. In addition, a number of the smaller Certification Bodies in BC are already volunteer operated, with the majority of the costs of certification being tied to the Verification Officer. If a group certification model still requires the administration involved with internal inspection of each farmer once per year, will the cost savings of limited external inspections make a noticeable impact on the bottom line? COABC will be undertaking further research to answer these and other questions.

But cost is not the only issue. Apart from the potential for lower certification costs, the added advantages of the group certification model are that it allows for small farmers to retain a voice within the organic sector, providing a vehicle through which they can organize; that it can stimulate farmer to farmer learning through closer interaction and awareness of each other's practices; and that it may also bring about a commitment to joint marketing. Only by applying this model in the Canadian context will we be able to see the extent to which it can meet the needs of small producers for cost effective certification.

The tentative solutions that we explored during the Board retreat are promising. However, they don't address all the problems associated with COABC's budget shortfall. Finding ways to provide certification services more cheaply doesn't dramatically decrease the minimum operating costs of the provincial body. The Board explored other ways to increase the income of the organization, building on the good will and groundswell of public support created through years of honest work and integrity. Public events, continued fundraising and opportunities for individuals to support the organization directly were all proposed as long-term solutions to keep this organization on the leading edge of organic agriculture in British Columbia. Again, these options will be explored more fully.

As an organization we are evolving to meet the realities of a changing and growing organic market. There are growing pains associated with this evolution, but we have a committed core of volunteers who will make sure that we remain true to our farming roots and find solutions that work for the full diversity of our membership. ✓

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On Solid Ground - restructuring COABC

by Cathleen Kneen

What do you do when your expenses are going to be greater than your income? Most of us try to cut costs and increase income – both of which are usually challenging! Every year, it seems, COABC has faced this situation. Now, with the added challenge of the creation of PACS and the demise of several bio-regional CBs, the COABC Board decided to spend two days generating ideas about how to restructure the organization so that it will be able to fulfill the needs of its members and be financially viable over the long term.

One of the needs the members have made clear is that fees for certification/accreditation should not increase, certainly not more than inflation; and for some members (and former members) they are already too high.



Sharyn Pollitt, Treasurer, reviews the financial reports with Pat Mallet

Another need is the information and public education that the organization provides – everything from the BC Organic Grower and the website and list, to our involvement in government and other committees to ensure that policies they develop do not harm organic production.

Some members feel that they are getting a Cadillac with ISO 65 and US NOP equivalence certification when what they really want is

a bicycle that will get them and their produce around the local neighbourhood.

The Board is also aware that things are changing around us, particularly with the development of a regulated national organic scheme, the creation of a non-bioregional certification body in PACS, and the growth of general public support for the principles underlying organic production.

There are no answers to these concerns – yet. But after two days of intense work, the Board began to see the outlines of a series of options to be presented to the membership for decision-making at the AGM in February. These options need to be fleshed out with their structural and financial implications, and this will be done in time to have a report mailed to every member by the end of January, 2004.

In the meantime, however, some basic principles were agreed.

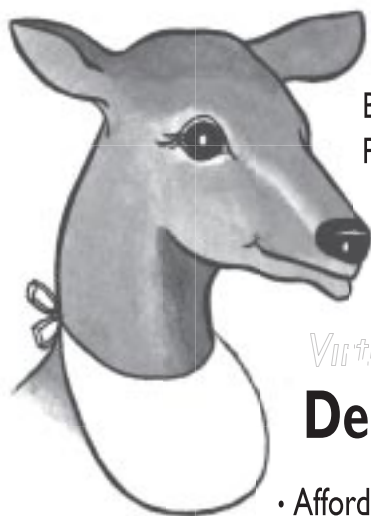
☆ user-pay: those who require a 'higher' level of certification/accreditation such as ISO 65 will continue to be required to pay the added costs.

☆ no increase in COABC fees in 2004 (these are the fees that COABC assesses its member CBs for their farmer members): although the organization is facing a financial crunch, we believe we can make it through 2004. The decisions made at the February 2004 AGM will relate to 2005.

☆ open membership: COABC is the organization

continued on page 6...

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...continued from page 5

responsible for the BC Organic Program, which serves not only producers but also the customers who are assured of the quality of B.C. Certified Organic products, and the general public whose environment is protected and enhanced by organic practices. We think that there are many people who would therefore be willing to financially support the organization as members (or by donations) once we figure out how to make this practical.

★ farmer control of certification/accreditation: the decisions regarding standards and certification must continue to be in the hands of farmers.

★ staffing needs to be adequate to support the core functions of the organization; other key activities can be undertaken by volunteers. Job descriptions for some of these will be drawn up so that a "Job Fair" can be held at the AGM for volunteers.

COABC owes a debt of gratitude to Anne Macey for the excellent work she did in preparation for the retreat, which, along with the thorough financial picture prepared by our Treasurer, Sharyn Pollitt, allowed us to assess our situation and think through the possibilities in an orderly fashion. It is indeed heartening to see the quality of energy and good-will manifested by the Board members through some very difficult discussions. Members of the Board represent a huge range of opinions (both their own and those of their CB members), and yet we were able to work together, respecting differences and achieving the basis for some creative decision-making by the whole organization. ✓



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Pro Organics in the Limelight

Debra Boyle credits her prodigious energy to eating organic food since 1977. Certainly the growth of Pro Organics – from her beginnings as a single mother delivering vegetables with a beat-up station wagon and a \$10,000 loan from a friend – to a national organic foods distributor with centres in Burnaby BC, Montreal, and Toronto and annual revenues of about \$35 million, is testimony to not only her energy but also her vision and management skills.

Pro Organics' mission – "Promoting the growth and integrity of organics from field to table" – is also Debbie's personal mission. "I give unconditionally," she says. "I feel blessed to have achieved as far as I have and have 4 children and grandchildren." It came as no surprise to anyone who knows this youthful grandmother when it was announced that "Debra Boyle, President and CEO of Pro Organics, has been chosen as the 2003 Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year in the category Impact on the Local Economy".

For several years, Pro Organics has been recognized as one of the "50 Best Managed Private Companies" in Canada.

A press release from the company states "Pro Organics sources certified organic products from Canadian suppliers as much as possible and works closely with growers to expand production. However, due to seasonal limitations and insufficient supply (Canada's demand for organic foods far outstrips local supply year-round), Pro Organics also imports product from the United States, Mexico and overseas, supporting organic growers world-wide. As well, the company donates significant time and money to organic sector organizations in Canada and the U.S. to help increase organic production and to promote organics in North America."

Debbie and her staff of 120 have helped move organic foods into the "mainstream". But Pro

has also led in other ways. Through the company's Giving Program and the Pro Organics Foundation it has supported many local initiatives – one small example is the monthly donation of fresh produce to a local program helping young pregnant women – and the annual Golf

Classic raises funds for Covenant House in Vancouver. (This record was recognized with an Ethics In Action award for corporate social responsibility in November 2003.) The company is also generous in its support of many initiatives in the organic sector, including sponsorship of COABC events. Pro's management practices are also progressive: they have a company-wide gain-sharing program, and regular consultations with employees (which are acted upon) regarding issues such as workplace environment.



Woman Entrepreneur of the Year

When Pro Organics was purchased in October, 2003, by Stake Technology (now SunOpta Inc.), a Canadian "owner/operator of high-growth ethical businesses", it was logical next step from Debbie's perspective. "It takes the personal burden off and offers better funding and help with merchandising so we can do more things to grow the organic market in Canada." The management and direction will not be affected by the buyout, she insists. "They don't run companies," Debbie points out, and adds, "Our thing was never control, it was leadership." ✓



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Inventions

by Robert Hettler

Humankind is often distinguished from animals as being tool makers. I love to create tools to solve problems I face. Often an hour spent building a simple tool will save hours and hours when doing repetitive tasks. For example, I remember vividly the first time I planted one acre of carrots. Until then my wheel weeder had done the job of weeding between the rows. After a couple of laps up and down the first two 500 plus foot rows, I decided it would take 2 days to do this job. Besides, I was already exhausted. I had just bought an old IH Super C with belly cultivators. I spent an hour and a half welding up some knives which would not bury the baby carrots when weeding between the rows. Half an hour of weeding on the tractor finished the job on the remaining 50 plus rows.

Six years working with small farmers in Northeast Brazil made me acutely aware what it is like to farm with only a hoe for a tool. Many farmers there do not even own a wheel barrow.

My first trip to the dump here yielded so many bike tires and frames, my son and I spent the next few months building farm implements. We built tables, carts and wheel barrows with the extra wheels. Although bike tires have no lateral strength, they can carry a tremendous weight if kept from being pushed sideways. The 2 wheeled cart we built, much like the ones sold commercially, was the most useful in our early years of farming for hauling produce about.



The next stage of home made implements came with the discovery of used dirt bike tires. Dirt bike

riders destroy their bikes, except for the 3 by 21 inch front dirt bike tires and rims. These carry much more weight than bicycle tires and are tall and skinny so work well in row crops. I bought mine for \$20 a tire complete with bolt from a local motorcycle bone yard.

The first project was what I call straddle buggies. They are four wheel steel framed planting

and weeding pedal-powered buggies. They use bike parts to drive just one tire, and are geared down so it takes four pedal revolutions for one wheel revolution. (see photo) The user lies face down on the foam bed, places his feet into the stirrups on the pedals and begins to plant, weed or harvest. The unit is the same width as the tractor and rototiller beds, so tends to self steer most of the time. It is excellent for tasks like planting strawberry transplants, where one plant is put in every foot or 16 inches. I have also used mine to plant onion sets, garlic and similar crops. It also works well to pick crops like pickling cucumbers or strawberries. For persons with knee or back problems, it saves the body an immense amount of discomfort as your back is kept straight, as well as your knees off the ground.

Recently the motor bike tires have been used more for building trailers for use behind my all terrain vehicles (ATVs). I built 32 by 84 inch trailers which are often hooked up in tandem to haul in crops from the fields. The low bed height of the trailers makes them easy to load and unload. The trailers easily carry 500 pounds





each, so on occasion we have hauled a ton of carrots in for washing with one ATV and four trailers. On some of the trailers we have also used low and wider tires so there are no tires above the trailer bed (see photo).

I sell at farmers' markets from April till the end of October. Over the years I have had various market set ups. For the last five years I have



used a market stand that I built from the ground up (see photo). Its main advantage is the protection it gives (from rain and hot sun) not only to the cus-

tomers, but also to the produce and for us.

There are two separate units, about 3 feet deep and 7 feet long each (because at the time we had 8-foot stalls at the market). The bottom is built of 3/4 in plywood and placed on 6 in casters. It is closed at the front but open at the back for bins or boxes, which allows the produce to stay cool and also helps hold the whole unit down. The canopy frame is made from 3/4 in light-wall square steel tubing. The front and back wings go up and fold down quickly on set up or take down. I used simple hinges to allow the canopy to be raised and lowered, and it is held up in place with a sliding square rod with holes in it and a pin in either side so it can't move up or down until you want it to.

The top was custom covered with commercial awning, which is both attractive and sturdy, so

does not flap in the wind. An unexpected advantage is the way the awning blocks all the heat and radiation which comes through most cloth or plastic tent covers. This is significant during a hot summer like this last one. We regularly get customers saying how we have such a cool location, not realizing it is the stand cover which is cutting out the heat. The difference also affects how the vegetables last.

The other advantage of the stand is the ability to have two levels of produce, making it look like there is more stuff there, which does help draw customers (that's why they have mirrors behind the produce displays in the supermarket). The whole unit is on casters so can be dollied about.



A major drawback has been the need to build a special trailer to haul the stands.

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Robert Hettler email: hettler@sunwave.net or phone 250-546-3669



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When Organics go Mainstream

by Vijay Cuddeford

This is an edited version of an article which appeared in Alternatives. Reprinted by permission.

Organics are the latest corporate success story. Two US organic and natural food retail chains - Wild Oats and Whole Foods Markets - have over 200 outlets and sales of around one billion US dollars annually. Food industry giants General Mills, Gerber, Heinz, Dole, Kellogg's, Mars, ConAgra and ADM are all marketing organic food brands. General Mills now owns leading organic manufacturers Cascadian Farms and Muir Glen. Kraft owns Boca Burgers and a share in the Hain Celestial Group, the makers of Celestial Seasonings teas and other natural foods. Heinz has developed organic ketchup. Wal-Mart stocks organic foods. People are even eating organic TV dinners.

The largest organic supermarket chain in the US has been accused of being anti-union. And corporate consolidation means that five gigantic farms control half of California's \$400 million (US) organic produce market.

For advocates of organic food, the successful entry of large corporate players into the organic market is raising some difficult questions about the key values and vision for sustainable agriculture. On the one hand, activists are happy that organic foods have achieved such wide appeal. Some industry pundits argue that without the support of supermarkets, organics will never develop the political clout needed to shift government policy on food production in the direction of sustainability.

On the other hand, some worry that the vision of early organic activists - who sought not only healthier food and more environmentally friendly production but also smaller and locally based alternatives to the dominant food system - is being lost in the rush to maximize market share. These critics point out that the current expansion of organics to include sourcing cheap raw materials from developing countries reproduces

the neo-colonial structure of the conventional food system.

They worry that when organics are added to the regular supermarket's dizzying array of choices, the consumer may somehow feel absolved of any need to think critically about the agri-food system. Supermarket organics may allow shoppers to assume they can eat healthier and be greener without changing, or inconveniencing, the consumer lifestyle.

While there's a temptation to lapse into an adversarial point-counterpoint debate, pitting the New and Greedy Corporate Organics against Old Sixties-style Organics, the caricatures have limited usefulness. The range of opinion in the organic movement/industry is much more diverse, and many believe that organics can be defined broadly enough to include a wide variety of practices and values.

Russ Christianson, a co-op specialist who has been involved in organics for two decades, favours the broad view: "The thing is to democratize the food economy - for farmers, distributors, retailers, wholesalers, other food workers, consumers, everyone. Good quality of food and work are the values. This doesn't necessarily mean organic, but it is defined by high quality and diversity."

Growing Canadian

The challenge faced by the organics movement in Canada today is how to expand the commercial success of organics without compromising the values that gave it birth, and how to continue to advocate for a more sustainable and democratic food system overall.

Right now 85 to 90% of organic food sold in Canada is imported from the US. Although the Canadian market for organic foods has been rather slow to develop, the last few years have witnessed rapid growth, especially with the entry of the national chain Loblaws into the organics market and the arrival of the US-based organic

the
challenge is
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chains. Canadian sales of organic food are expanding at about 12 to 14% per year and researchers estimate that organic sales will jump from the 1.8 percent share of the retail market they held in 1999 to 4.4% by 2010. Elsewhere – in Europe, the US and Japan – organics are also growing at a tremendous rate. It is expected that organic farms will account for ten percent of all farmed land in Europe by 2005. Austria is already at 15%, Italy at up to 25%, and some provinces of Germany are at 30%.

Here in Canada, an estimated 430,000 hectares are farmed organically, representing about 0.6 % of all farmed land in Canada. There are an estimated 3236 organic farms in Canada, with Saskatchewan boasting more than one-third of the total. The majority of Canada's organic acreage is devoted to organic grains and oilseeds, a sector where Canada ranks among the top five world producers.¹⁰ The bulk of Canada's organic food production is thus exported to the US, Europe and Japan. For most commodities in most regions, however, domestic supply in Canada is simply insufficient to meet demand.

Increasing supply

Many Canadian farmers are interested in entering the organic market, but making the transition to organic farming isn't easy.

Linda Edwards grows organic apples in the BC interior. When making the transition to organic production, she and her partner were catapulted into a crash course on everything to do with compost - what compostable materials work best for their operation, where to source them, what quantities to apply and how to monitor composting progress. "Thirteen years later we're still learning," says Edwards. "Every batch of compost is different. It's not like adding a specified amount of commercial fertilizer; it isn't an exact science. It's a never-ending learning process."

After transition, organic farming can bolster the farmer's bottom line. Direct sales of local organic produce may return up to 80 cents of each food dollar directly to the farmer. This compares well with the 19 cents received on average by conventional farmers trading bulk commodities. Indeed, an October 2000 report written for the

Canadian Agri-Food Trade Service speculated that organic products' premium prices might save the family farm.

The development of organic processing in Canada has also been slow because of the inadequate supply of domestic organics. According to Robert Beauchemin of La Meunerie Milanaise, a Quebec City-based organic grain processor, the two most difficult challenges he faces are a lack of organic, non-genetically modified (GM) processing ingredients, and sharply increased demand.

For example, it has been difficult to find non-GM sources of cornstarch. Organic flax is also in short supply, and the price has tripled in the past few years due to the combination of low yields (from bad weather) and increased demand. In addition, the entry of large corporate players into the organic processing market may drive down consumer prices and squeeze out many processors. China is poised to enter the

continued on page 12...

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organic market, and there is a fear that they will offer such low prices to retailers that many growers and processors will not be able to compete.

Global markets

Low prices aren't the only problem with the growing global trade in organics. Food grown by an organic farmer and sold at a local farmers' market, at the farm gate or to local restaurants eats up a comparatively small amount of fossil fuel from transportation, refrigeration and packaging. Not so for organic Hawaiian papayas refrigerated and shipped to Toronto in mid-winter. Nor for organic TV dinners, whose certified organic ingredients may be grown in several different countries.

Also absent in organic standards are any requirements for enhancing biodiversity. Without formal requirements for habitat preservation and farming practices that enhance biodiversity, there is little, say critics, to stop a monoculture, fence-row-to-fence-row farm from being certified organic. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) recently requested proposals to develop biodiversity standards for organic production and has been working internationally with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature for several years on these issues.

Neglect of these core environmental principles is leading to questions about the entire certification system. Some farmers in both Canada and the US are letting go of the word "organic", forgoing the certification process, and primarily selling their produce at local farmers' markets and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs). These changes are driven in part by farmers' beliefs that the word "organic" has been devalued by the entry of corporate players. But additional motivations include a desire for more intimate trading relationships with their customers, and the increasing costs of certification.

Future directions

Others are arguing that the organics movement

must have an active hand in deciding the future of organics in Canada, rather than simply letting market forces and existing government approaches determine its fate. "Ensuring adequate domestic production and healthy local markets is key," says Rod MacRae, who along with Christianson, Beauchemin and two other Canadian organics leaders recently prepared a strategic plan for the sector. The plan attempts to chart a successful course for the future of organics in Canada, including increased Canadian organic production, particularly for domestic use; a healthy income for all organic producers; affordability of organic food for all Canadians; and a robust organic processing sector.

organic
foods
imported by
Britain may have
travelled
240,000km

Supportive government policies are important, but many initiatives can be pursued by organic producers themselves. For example, local markets for organic produce can be encouraged through "buy local organic" campaigns. More collaboration among local producers, processors and consumers could not come too soon. There is concern that the growing organic sector will mimic the structure of the conventional food sector, with high ownership concentration in retail markets, vertical integration and export-based regional niches. And while supermarkets appear to be making some effort to buy local organic produce, their organic products are accumulating just as many travel points as their conventional counterparts.

The concerns and values that triggered the development of organic agriculture in the first place are clearly being tested by its seeming success. That original vision saw success not only as commercial expansion, but as the expansion of a civic dialogue focused on bringing sustainability and social justice to the food system. It is a vision characterized by caring and just relationships to local places, and to human beings. If the organic industry cannot retain at least a decent measure of this vision, then its commercial success will ring hollow, and render organic food as transitory and expendable as any other link in the industrial food chain.

Vijay Cuddeford is a writer and researcher on environmental issues, with an emphasis on food systems.



A Fairy Story

by Lee McFadyen

Once upon a time a beautiful sphere rotated in space. This sphere was home to all kinds of wonderful and unusual life. Clean fresh water ran from the mountains to the ocean. In these streams many creatures lived. These creatures all contributed to the streams' well being. The oceans flowed freely between and around the land masses from which the streams came. The waters were interconnected. The land was interconnected. All life in this magical sphere was interconnected. Species came and went according to the nature of events. Some contributed to their own demise, some were obliterated by natural phenomena. All left their footprint.

On the dawn of a beautiful spring morning, one creature, Prince Powerful, found science and technology. He decided that science and technology could do all kinds of useful things for his family. At first many family members were suspicious of these new tools, but slowly they became known and understood. Shelter improved, water was moved to where it was needed and Prince Powerful's family learned how to manipulate the land to improve food production. For many, life was easier, more certain. The family spread across the sphere.

As the family grew so did the use of S&T. Family life and S&T became inseparable. It brought about many useful and miraculous changes. As some members of the family realized the potential of S&T, Greed often became the driver. One day the family woke up and realized that their helpful tool, S&T, was now their master. S&T dominated inland waterways, the oceans, the sky, the food producing lands. S&T bred S&T. And the family realized, that while S&T had been a wonderful servant, it was not a kind master. The waterways, oceans, forests and grasslands were sick. If life was to continue something must be done.

There were many solutions, but to implement them, Power and Greed had to be relinquished. This was a daunting task. Patience, tolerance and understanding were needed.

Finally one day Princess Charming appeared. Her dress was made of Integrity and she wore a cap of Courage on her head. She carried many important messages which would contribute to the healing of many of the problems that were mak-

ing the sphere sick. Power and Greed had no place in her message. She advocated a holistic approach to the sickness – the development of organic farming methods which must include maintenance of a sustainable environment that promotes and enhances biological activity and practises that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological systems, with respect for the physical and social needs of the sphere's biodiversity. Age old natural systems would be the model, with S&T as a valuable tool.

Princess Charming was wise. She knew it would take diligence and time but most importantly, the family would have to work together to implement the solutions. They would have to support each other. They would have to share knowledge. She also knew that individuals in the family were not born equal, some would take leadership roles, others would follow and yet others would flow with the current. At times the current would be very strong and threaten to sweep all the wisdom away. But Princess Charming was stronger. Her courage and commitment would overcome.

Slowly the family embraced her message, her wisdom, and saw that these basic principles could be applied in diverse ways, far beyond her initial vision. And each time her wisdom was embraced by a new sector in the family, a healing process began. Princess Charming knew that she did not have all the answers. That sometimes they are slow in unfolding. That diligence and team work assists the process. That what might be a solution today may turn into a problem tomorrow, but to not take some risk can let wonderful opportunities slip by. That solutions evolve as knowledge increases. That trust is basic to the process and is not always easy to build. But a first step must be taken.

And so the family slowly began the healing process. And tried to live happily ever after.



Editor's Note:

Readers who are interested in pursuing discussion of philosophical and political issues in the organic movement may wish to sign on to the COABC listserv through www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

The Organic Prison Farm

The Ferndale Minimum Security Institution in Mission is getting involved in organic agriculture. The prison will turn 50 hectares of class 1 and 2 land into an organic production unit with vegetables, berries and tree fruits, and build a new 4000 m² greenhouse to raise bedding plants, herbs and winter vegetables. They also plan to have approximately 7000 laying hens which will provide much needed protein to the diets of the Program's target population, as well as valuable organic fertiliser and chicken tractors. They will be using idle farming equipment from other correctional facilities in BC.

Since 90% of the land has not been cultivated or exposed to synthetic chemicals for the last 12 years, Ferndale expects a two to three-year transition period to organic certification.

The Ferndale Organic Farm and Vocational Training Program (OFVT) is designed to provide (1) nutritious, organic food at-cost or no-cost to

food providers who feed the food-insecure in the Lower Mainland; (2) meaningful work opportunities for federal offenders at or nearing the point of conditional release to the community at-large.

Inmates participating in the OFVT program – many of whom are at risk for unemployment, under-employment, food-insecurity and homelessness – will undertake a training and education venture in a proposed partnership with the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at UBC. Through an Organic Agriculture Certificate Program, offenders will acquire knowledge and skills with a combination of classroom and field work. It is expected that 30-40 inmates would work the farm annually by the third year. Another 20 would be trained as cooks through an accredited Cook's Training Program.

Most of the food produced (after the inmates themselves have been fed) will be transformed into hot meals for delivery to individuals and families in need, and to schools in communities in the region. About 10 to 20 percent will be donated or sold at cost to existing Lower Mainland food providers.

To achieve a measure of cost recovery, some produce (herbs) will be sold to a Lower Mainland processor. Considerable care has been taken to ensure that prison produce will not compete unfairly in local markets.

For more information, contact Anthony (Tony) Brunetti, OFVT Program Manager, brunetti@interchange.ubc.ca



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Your Environmental Farm Plan

by Rochelle Eisen

On-farm Environmental Farm Plan consulting services to COABC licensees should be available as soon as COABC has a signed delivery group agreement with the BC Ag Council. We hope this will be in place in time for spring 2004.

So what is EFP and why should organic farmers be interested? The EFP program is designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of BC's agriculture sector by reducing the risk to water quality and quantity, health of soils, health of air and the atmosphere and biodiversity. These are all concepts near and dear to each of us in the organic community, and both Elaine Spearing and I felt in our element discussing these issues with the other planner trainees at the EFP trainings this Fall.

EFPs look carefully at on-farm nutrient management, manure handling, storage (fuel, pesticide, fertilizer), farm waste, water use and wildlife

habitat. All types of production systems can benefit from completing a plan including: crops, livestock, greenhouse and mushrooms. A completed EFP can help producers to assess and improve how they protect the environment, improve efficiencies through reduced resource use and waste and will demonstrate due diligence in the event of prosecution or litigation.

The entire EFP program is voluntary and confidential unless the producer wishes otherwise. Producers can get help developing their plan, free of charge, from a trained EFP planner (hint hint Elaine and I will be available) and farmers may qualify for partial funding to implement improvements. You can find out more at our EFP farmer orientation at the AGM, or call us.

Rochelle Eisen / 250.494.7980 / rare@telus.net
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Cover Crops for Soil Improvement

by Oscar Somasco

On-farm trials in the Kootenay region

Cover crops are an essential component of sustainable production and their multiple benefits have been well documented. Cover crops promote beneficial soil organisms, prevent soil erosion, add N to the soil, improve soil structure, prevent compaction during wet weather, suppress weeds and promote beneficial arthropods. For organic farmers the importance of cover crops cannot be overstated, as the options for soil fertility management are limited. Manure that does not come from animals raised with genetically modified feed is now a scarce commodity. Cover crops are an economic and environmentally sound alternative to improve soil fertility, particularly, when animals are not raised on the farm and therefore manure is only available as an often costly, off-farm product.

Selecting a cover crop that is well adapted to local conditions and cropping systems is critical to successful cover cropping. Yet, very little research and grower experience exist in our regions to enable farmers to make an informed choice of cover crop and management practices. Optimal planting and incorporation dates for different species, as well as most advantageous combinations of cover crop species for maximum biomass production are examples of the kind of information that is needed. Pest management as well as pest interactions with other crops needs to be studied also, to uncover potential risks of cover crops, which have the potential of exacerbating pest problems on other crops.

During my visits to farms in the Kootenays and other regions of BC, I found that the use of cover crops, with some notable exceptions, is limited. Although Fall Rye as a winter cover is commonly planted, most often it is

planted without the benefit of a legume companion. By the same token, the number of cover crop species and varieties offered by local seed companies is very limited even when Canada is a producer and exporter of these seed crops. In many regions of BC, where land is a limiting factor, the selection of the right cover crop becomes more critical as a niche within the rotation must be identified where the cover crop can grow without delaying planting dates for the main crop and yet providing time to maximize biomass production of the cover crop. Because of our relatively short growing season in the Kootenays, finding these niches becomes difficult.

To find answers to some of these challenges, a cover crop trial was initiated in the Kootenays in the spring of 2003, as a component of a larger project sponsored by the AFFF Organic Sector Initiative entitled 'Feeding Our Communities: Strengthening Organic Agriculture in the Kootenays'. I had to limit the number of species that would be included in the experiment as funds, land and labor were in short supply, but I decided to give priority to cool-season species, in general, and particularly legumes as they have the potential to add nitrogen, a nutrient that can be a limiting factor in organic systems.

Table 1: Cover crop species included in the spring planted trial.

Common name	Scientific name	Characteristics
Field Pea	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	Winter hardy, perennial legume
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Winter hardy, biennial legume
Crimson Clover	<i>Trifolium incarnatum</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Berseem Clover	<i>Trifolium alexandrinum</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Subterranean Clover	<i>Trifolium subterraneum</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Yellow Sweetclover	<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	Winter hardy, biennial legume
Hairy Vetch	<i>Vicia villosa</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Bell Bean	<i>Vicia faba</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Lana Vetch	<i>Vicia villosa</i> ssp. <i>dasicarpa</i>	Cool-season, annual legume
Tansy Phacelia	<i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i>	Cool-season, annual forb
Oat	<i>Avena sativa</i>	Cool-season, annual grass
Annual Ryegrass	<i>Lolium multiflorum</i>	Cool-season, annual grass
Fall Rye	<i>Secale cereale</i>	Cool-season, annual grass

Two planting dates were planned: an early spring planting date and a fall planting date. Although the early spring planting date would result in some overlap, if maximum biomass is desired, it is well suited for late-seeded or transplanted, warm-season crops such as corn, tomatoes, squash, etc. The fall planting date was put in the ground in September 2003 and its main purpose is to provide winter survival information on the species included and to determine biomass production at required plowdown dates the following spring. This information is important, as changes in weather conditions, particularly milder winters with varying snow cover may reveal that previous grower experience or information is dated. This winter will provide a relatively severe test as in November temperatures plummeted below normal without the benefit of snow cover.

Grass/Legume Mixtures

Grasses and legumes are well adapted to growing together, a fact that was well known by the native peoples of the Americas who have grown corn and beans side by side for millennia. Grasses can make efficient use of nitrogen already in the soil, because of their extensive, fibrous root system while legumes are capable of fixing atmospheric nitrogen through a symbiotic relationship with Rhizobia bacteria. Nitrogen fixation will not occur in significant amounts where N in the soil is readily available; the N scavenging properties of grasses therefore promote N-fixation by legumes. Oats, Ryegrass and Fall Rye were interseeded, as 'nurse crops', with small-seeded legumes in our experiment, to help suppress weeds, as these legumes are slow to get established and don't compete well with weeds. The use of grass-legume mixtures also enables cover crops to respond to spatial varia-

tion in soil, in nitrogen-poor areas legumes tend to dominate whereas grasses thrive in areas rich in nitrogen. Mixes don't need to include just a single legume and grass species but may have several components. When the cover crop mix is allowed to grow for a long period, the inclusion of several species in the mixture allows for better use of the growing season, as one species starts to slow down another may peak.



A number of cover crop mixes were included in the spring planting date (Table 2), some simple mixes of a legume interseeded with a grass (as a nurse crop) and other combinations that included up to four components. The percentages were calculated as proportion of individual seed weight to total seed weight in the mix. These

proportions have to be considered carefully as excessive cereal grain seed would result in too much competition and little growth of the legume components, especially if they are small-seeded clovers.

Some Preliminary Results

It is premature to draw definite conclusions at this point as part of the trial is still in the ground, and one more round of observations and data will be collected during the spring of 2004. However, I would like to comment on some of the findings of the spring trial. This trial was planted in two sites; the differences between the sites were striking. As expected, the higher fertility site produced higher biomass, taller crops and better ground coverage. For example, the 4 component mix (Oat, Field Pea, Lana Vetch and Bell Bean) reached heights of well over 3 feet in the higher fertility site. By contrast, in the lower fertility site this mix only reached 2 feet and the plants were spindlier resulting in poorer ground coverage. By the same token,

continued on page 18...

Crimson clover produced a dense mat with plants reaching a height of 2 feet in fertile ground whereas the same species produced a single stem and only reached 1 foot in the lower fertility site. Cover crops are often seen as rustic crops that can grow well even in poor soil, however, like all other crop plants they will grow poorly in the presence of nutrient deficiencies. A soil test is recommended prior to growing cover crops, particularly in soils that have not been cropped for years, to determine whether severe nutrient deficiencies or pH imbalances exist that may be easily corrected by use of soil amendments. In addition, when poor soil conditions are expected or when appropriate seeding equipment is not available, seeding rates that are at least double of those recommended by seed companies are advisable to avoid poor stands.

The 4-component mix described above proved to be a definite winner when maximum biomass is the goal. The oats and bell beans (a small-seeded fava variety) provided the scaffolding for the field pea and vetch to climb and the seeding rates used provided a good balance of the four species. Some growers felt that with its height and dense growth, this mix would be a management challenge at incorporation time. Mowing prior to incorporation is necessary but the rotary mower tends to flatten the stand as it moves through leaving the crop on the ground not thoroughly chopped. A flail mower that tends to suck up the stems and breakdown the crop into small pieces is a better choice for cover crop management; the aftermath can be easily incorporated with a set of discs or the rototiller. A simpler and more economical alternative to this 4-component mix was the Oat/Lana Vetch entry. Of the two vetches tested Lana Vetch was earlier, produced more biomass; and being an aggressive climber seemed to perform better than Hairy Vetch in the aforementioned mixes.

Table 2: Mixes included in the spring planted trial.

Oat / Vetch (Lana)	35% / 65%
Annual Ryegrass / Red Clover	66% / 34%
Oat / Yellow Sweetclover	75% / 25%
Bell Bean / Field Pea / Vetch (Lana) / Oat	40%/20%/30%/10%
Field Pea / Vetch (Hairy) / Oat	60%/15%/25%

Two other excellent performers were Crimson Clover and Subterranean Clover, both when planted as single crops resulted in a dense mat with great ground coverage at least in good fertility conditions. Crimson clover was taller and earlier to flower with beautiful blooms. White Clover, the only perennial legume in the trial, is smaller seeded and although slower to get established is a reliable, low-growing perennial that would be ideal for pathways, once established, as it tolerates repeated mowing. Subterranean Clover is another clover that showed great tolerance to mowing, providing a useful tool for controlling weeds in pure stands as these clovers recover much better than weeds after mowing. The Vetches and Bell Bean will not regrow after mowing when cut after flower initiation. However, this may not be a disadvantage in certain situations, for example, tomatoes have been transplanted directly into a mowed vetch cover with excellent results. In this no-tillage tomato production system, as the vetch does not regrow after mowing, it does not need to be plowed under and the clippings can be left as a mulch around tomato transplants. For details, see the publication listed under references.

Other clovers, such as Berseem, Red and Yellow Sweet Clover, were more difficult to establish and were not as desirable when maximum biomass and rapid growth was the goal.

However, both Red and Sweet clover are biennials and tend not to complete their life cycle until the next year, so that their use may be indicated when the goal is to create a ground cover that would last the entire season, overwinter and be plowdown the next spring. The Annual Ryegrass/Red Clover entry was a well-balanced mix and would be an excellent choice in this situation, as it remained green and healthy through the summer while the other mixes began to senesce. Although not a legume, Tansy Phacelia, has a very high N content and decomposes rapidly after incorporation. This small seeded plant grew rapidly in our trial, especially in the more fertile site and competed well with weeds. With a long flowering period, this was the preferred plant of honey and other bees in our trial. As the seed is currently very expensive, small quantities can be added to mixes where attracting bees is a goal.

In conclusion, this was an exciting and rare opportunity for growers in the Kootenays to see first hand cover crop performance in our soils and weather conditions and to generate knowledge that is relevant to our region. I took many slides of the plots and reviewing and summarizing of the data collected is in process. Although the number of species I was able to test was limited, several species and combinations tested showed great potential. Other aspects of cover crop management as well as performance of crops following incorporation of cover crops also needs to be tested. Much of this could be done directly by individual farmers in on-farm trials.

Lack of appropriate equipment will remain a problem for small growers and we will need to ask our seed companies carry a good selection of cover crop seed and at accessible prices. These are not insurmountable challenges, especially when small growers join together through equipment and buying cooperatives. Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt thank you to all the people whose help made this project possible.

References and further reading on request from the office.





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Opportunity for Input on Supply Management

A recent court order has required Olera Farms to comply with the British Columbia Egg Marketing Board rules and regulations, which includes the payment of thousands of dollars of permit and levy fees. This court order, unfortunately, was the last straw for Fred Reid and his family. With deep regret, Fred announced that Olera Farms has closed the doors of its organic egg production and grading business. After years of lobbying (with tremendous consumer support) and battling in court to maintain independence for the organic movement, he says "Olera Farms devoted all its resources to this fight and it has personally drained me financially and emotionally".

This action by the Egg Board has resulted in a backlash from the organic community. Retailers who have been supplied by Fred over the years

**Olera
Farms has closed
the doors of its egg
business**

voiced their outrage to the board for not only cutting off their supply of organic eggs but also for taking such a heavy handed action during a time of review – all of the boards have been mandated by the BC Farm Industry Review Board (formerly the BC Marketing Board or "super-board") to assess the effectiveness of their programs for specialty and niche markets (including organic) and to provide recommendations for improvements. Clearly, their current programs have not adequately addressed the needs and concerns of organic producers and the growing demand for organic products.

Nor is Olera Farms the only target. Organic and conventional "specialty" – free range, etc. – farms have also received seizure notices from the Board.

continued on page 20...

Please read the information on the COABC's "Growing the Organic "Supply Managed" Sector Initiative" below. We have an opportunity to provide input to ensure that programs are developed to nurture the growth of the organic sector – we urge you all to participate.

Growing the Organic "Supply Managed" Sector Initiative

The Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC) is undertaking a consultative initiative to research and develop various models to improve the current systems regulating the production and marketing of organic eggs, chicken, turkey and dairy products. Through this important initiative, the organic sector will have the opportunity to provide sound input into the review of supply managed specialty production which has been instigated by the BC Farm Industry Review Board (BCFIRB, formerly the BC Marketing Board). In addition, BCMAFF is developing a new economic policy framework for regulated markets and is seeking input from all stakeholders. The organic community needs to ensure that the marketing boards, the BCFIRB and BCMAFF fully understand the issues affecting the organic sector and develop programs that support the growth of organic production.

This COABC initiative is managed by a Project Team that includes a COABC subcommittee, Gunta Vitins of Pro Organics Marketing, and consultants Rick Barichello, Shinan Kassam, and Bill Andrews.

The COABC subcommittee is comprised of Rick Llewellyn of Jerseyland Farm, Brian Hughes of Kildara Farm and Peter Johnston of Heron Bay Farm. Gunta Vitins of Pro Organics Marketing Inc is helping to coordinate the initiative.

The COABC has obtained funding from the Organic Sector Development Program to hire expe-

rienced consultants to assist with the research and development of models. Rick Barichello, Professor of Agricultural Economics at UBC and Shinan Kassam, PhD student at UBC, will survey producers to obtain information regarding true costs of production, production levels, market demand, risks inherent in organic production, and to obtain feedback on the challenges of the current systems and possible options for improvement. Rick and Shinan were hired because of their knowledge of supply management systems and their ability to "think outside of the box".



In addition, the COABC has hired Bill Andrews, lawyer, through the generous support of the West Coast Environmental Law Society's "Environmental Dispute Resolution Fund" to investigate legal issues dealing with changes to the supply management systems. Bill has extensive experience with multi-stakeholder negotiations, policy analysis, and

law reform. (For more information on the Project Team members, please visit the COABC website at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/ and click on the link for the project which is located at the bottom of the subject listings on the homepage.)

Rick and Shinan's consultations with producers will begin on November 15th and run through to mid December 2003. Information will be collected in absolute confidence and will be presented in an aggregate manner, thereby protecting the

Stage	Description	Date of Completion
1	Research and development of models	Dec. 22, 2003
2	Models reviewed by COABC members, organic sector stakeholders, BCMAFF, BCMB, marketing boards	Jan. 12, 2004
3	Refinement of models based on feedback	Jan. 26, 2004
4	Models reviewed by COABC members, organic sector stakeholders, BCMAFF, BCMB, and marketing boards	Feb. 23, 2004
5	Report finalized and information shared with COABC members, stakeholders, BCMB, BCMAFF and marketing boards	Mar. 15, 2004

identity of individual producers.

All interested members of the organic community, in particular the COABC membership, will have the opportunity to provide input into the development and refinement of models. In fact, the project cannot move forward without their input. COABC member input will be obtained via a survey which will be sent to every member at the end of December and most likely again in February 2004.

It is extremely important that producers of organic eggs, chicken, turkey, or milk who are producing at the "threshold levels" noted below, provide their input to the COABC's consultative initiative. Your participation is critical to ensuring that programs will be developed to truly meet the needs of the organic sector.

Organic chicken, egg, turkey and dairy producers are invited to contact Rick Barichello, Professor of Agricultural Economics at UBC, to provide their input in confidence. Tel: 604-822-3473 Email: rick.barichello@ubc.ca

"Threshold" Production Levels :

Organic Eggs:	100 or more layers
Organic Chicken:	200 or more birds per year
Organic Turkey:	25 birds or more
Organic Milk:	any milk that is produced for commercial sale

Project Committees:

Strategy Committee – Organic sector stakeholders (affected producers, retailers, distributors, home delivery companies, restaurateurs and supportive organizations such as the BCSP-CA) are invited to participate on the Strategy Committee. This group will help guide the project process and provide information on issues affecting the organic sector.

Consultation Committee – A Consultation Committee has been established to guide the consultation process with the marketing boards, BCFIRB, and BCMAFF to ensure that these parties are fully engaged in the project and are providing input to the research and development of models. The committee is comprised of representatives of the marketing boards, the BCFIRB and its advisor (Kathleen Gibson), organic sector





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stakeholders (the "Organic Coalition" – retailers, distributors, home delivery companies – original signatories of letters to the Premier), and the Project Team. Kathleen Gibson has been hired by the BCFIRB to assist it and the marketing boards in consultations with specialty producers and marketers.

For more information on this initiative, please contact:
Ric Llewellyn of Jerseyland Organic Farm (Grand Forks) -
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Organic Seed Regulations Tighten

By Rupert Jannasch

The pending regulation stipulating that organic growers must use certified organic seed after December 31, 2003, will prove to be logistical challenge. Certifiers need to verify the correct seed is being used, growers must make an honest effort to find it and someone must decide what happens when certified organic seed is unavailable.

The organic seed rule is a first step in developing an organic seed industry that would include the selection and breeding of crop varieties adapted to organic soil and crop management. It will also reduce the reliance on conventional seed sources where the trend to patented and controlled seed stock, including genetically engineered crops, is increasingly widespread. By and large, the standards of certifying bodies in Canada, Europe and the U.S. are harmonized on this issue.

Organic growers have been encouraged to use organic seed for many years, but certified organic seed for certain crops and varieties remains in chronically short supply or is non-existent. Seed supplies must catch up with demand and obliging growers to use certified seed will ensure this happens.

Organic seed production, however, is a very risky business without fungicides, especially in humid climates. In 2000, for example, 90% of the European pea seed crop was lost due to *Ascochyta*. Although supplies of some cereal seed are relatively abundant, certified organic seed of certain vegetable crops are hopelessly inadequate.

A broad, loosely based network of farmers, processors and traders and specialized seed companies across Canada do supply a variety of certified organic seeds. It is a well established, decentralized market in which farmers play a key role. Seed saving is also an important element in protecting the organic seed supply. Diligent inquiries with certifiers and fellow growers should enable most producers to quickly determine the availability of most seed.

Sourcing seed could be made easier if organic seed inventories were established. Growers looking for seed could then source it and farmers producing seed could sell it. Presumably the necessary information already exists in producer records held by certification bodies. Granted, building a database would involve some expense, but it should make the regulatory role of certifiers easier and, ultimately, make the goal of a certified organic seed supply more certain.

The Canadian Seed Growers Association reports that an increasing number of members are applying to produce Pedigree, certified organic seed. Primary crops of interest are cereals in Western Canada and some beans in eastern provinces. Spokesman, Randy Preater, claims that initial concerns about high weed counts have proven unfounded. "There have been no increases in the number of declines [rejections] of pedigree status among organic producers due to weeds," he says. The CSGA publishes a grower directory, by province, of pedigree seed producers, but does not identify which growers are certified organic.

Enforcement of the seed rule will involve some tricky decision making - especially when defining availability. For example, will a grower in British Columbia be obliged to import certified organic seed potatoes from Prince Edward Island? Technically speaking, these potatoes could be available, only freight would be extremely costly.

Also, if certified organic seed is felt to be weedy or impure, would a grower be obliged to use it?

In all likelihood, reasonable solutions can be found to these questions and others, but grow-



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SEEDS

ers should be prudent when searching for seed. The search should begin early – preferably in the fall with a chronological log of inquiries documented on paper. The log will provide evidence to certifiers that an honest effort has been made to source organic seed in case none is available. Letters from seed suppliers attesting that the seed is GMO-free are also essential (see the *Field Crops Handbook* by the Canadian Organic Growers or attra.ncat.org/attr-publ/altseed.html on how to keep crops GMO-free). Finally, caution is advised over the abundance of non-certified “organic” seed on the market. Remember, only seed certified by an accredited certification body using independent, third party inspection will meet the requirements of the organic seed rule.

Rupert Jannasch, M.Sc., P.Ag. is a consultant for the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada. Please send comments or questions by phone to 902-893-6275 or by email to oacc@nsac.ns.ca



Farm~Aid

Woodpecker Ranch is a beautiful 80 acre mixed farm located 30 miles south of Prince George. We have plans underway for a retreat and learning centre where we will host workshops on a variety of topics such as sustainable living, using alternative energy, rare breed conservancy, organic growing and healthy living.

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Announcements

Weed Control Forum for Field Crops & Grains

The Organic Milling Co-operative in Armstrong will host a Weed Control Half Day Forum in early February for interested local organic field crop and grain growers.

The forum will be an interactive session, starting with a presentation on local weed communities (especially lambsquarters, redroot pigweed, Canada thistle, cleavers, wild lettuce and bindweed) followed by organic weed control strategies and management options including crop rotations, nutrient amendments and mechanical control.

This will be followed by a panel discussion with local experienced organic and conventional field crop and grain farmers. Participants will be encouraged to ask questions and make comments.

Attendees will be able to improve their weed identification with weed specimens and weed identification posters.

For more information, please contact:

Andrea Gunner, P.Ag.
Organic Milling Co-operative
4218 Wyatt Road Armstrong, B.C. V0E 1B4
Tel (250) 546-2712 Fax (250) 546-2713
agunner@junction.net



Biodynamic AGM

March 27-28 2004. Chilliwack. Annual general meeting of the Bio-dynamic Agriculture Society of B.C.

Keynote speaker: Steve Diver, soil specialist.

Topic: Compost and manure management.

Contact:
Marjan de Jong
250-338-8342 • olf@mars.ark.com

SRC Studies Aquaculture Deeply *by Lee McFadyen*

The Aquaculture sub-committee of the Standards Review Committee has been requested to review organic standards for Aquaculture. Sarah Davidson, Carmen Wakeling, Peter Johnson, Laura Mowbray and Lee McFadyen sit on the SRC and the Aquaculture sub committee.

This fall we attended a day long workshop in Nanaimo, where scientists, representatives from Aquaculture, MAFF staff and representatives from environmental groups gave presentations and answered questions. Paddy Doherty and Rochelle Eisen joined us. Preceding this meeting the sub-committee visited several finfish and shell fish farms.

A public forum on the COABC website is posted and your comments, questions, suggestions and concerns are welcome.

A second draft document is being prepared and will be posted on the forum.

When the second draft is complete, the sub-committee will meet with representatives of the environmental NGO's, First Nation

Representatives, and scientists to review the draft, discuss issues that arise from it and explore solutions to potential problems. Some aquaculture representatives may also be present. This meeting will occur in the new year.

The sub-committee members are hoping for a team approach during this exploratory process as we decide whether we can develop aquaculture standards. There are many concerns from different interest groups and it is our sincere desire to examine as many of these as possible.

The Soil Association in England, and IFOAM have developed Aquaculture standards.

Once the sub-committee has made a decision it will go to the COABC Board of Directors, who make the final decision. This process may take up to a year.

Remember that the SRC relies on COABC members for input into the ongoing development of all standards so your participation is vital to the committee's function. ✓



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New Perspectives

by Lee McFadyen

I came from a position of: organic methods are soil-based so how can we certify aquaculture; there are too many unknowns; water does not sit still; we do not have the science – just a few of the more obvious barriers to trying to include this farming sector in the organic movement.

Then I saw ... what industry sends into the air worldwide returns to the earth indiscriminately; the legacy of past farming practices may never go away; the earth's food producing capabilities are finite; no new land is being built; food is fundamental to survival; we need to wisely use all the resources that nature provides and that our intellect can wisely nurture. Science and technology do have a place, but we must not become enslaved by them. And as to aquaculture, I have learned that there is a lot of science out there. You can pick the science to support your bias. Or you can use science to find solutions.

That organic methods are just that – methods of production, which is all its practitioners have control over. None of us can promise a pristine product and no one should expect such. But we do offer real solutions to real problems by choosing to do the best we can. We need to encourage their use, and in the process will make giant leaps in being part of the solution rather than remaining part of the problem.

And ... organic methods can be embraced in many ways. They are a way for individuals to take control of what is happening to this planet, by practising them and by supporting those who do practice them.

But we need a team approach. This means we must address our concerns in a non adversarial manner. We must become a team, and if we do so then I believe aquaculture can become part of the solution.

These thoughts are strictly my own and do not necessarily represent the COABC Directors, Members, or the Standards Review Committee. ✓



Criteria to Consider

The Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform believes farmed salmon will be safe when the industry:

- ✎ Uses technology that eliminates the risks of disease transfer and fish escapes
- ✎ Guarantees waste is not released into the ocean
- ✎ Labels their fish as “farmed” so consumers can make informed choices
- ✎ Ensures wildlife is not harmed as a result of fish farming
- ✎ Stops locating fish farms in areas opposed by aboriginal groups or other local communities
- ✎ Develops fish feed that doesn't deplete global fish stocks
- ✎ Prohibits the use of genetically modified fish
- ✎ Eliminates the use of antibiotics, pesticides and deleterious chemicals
- ✎ Ensures contaminants in farmed fish don't exceed safe levels ✓

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Certified organic hay and grains (wheat, buckwheat, malt barley, oats peas, faba beans and rye). Cleaned to food grade or rolled feed. Little Red Hen Mills, 780-855-2286 or 780-855-2164

Mandatory, Affordable - National

by Paddy Doherty

The Canadian organic community is making good progress towards a national organic regulation. In early November, a group of more than 35 people, including provincial and federal government representatives and other interested parties met in Ottawa for two days. They discussed the structure of the present voluntary organic system, the Regulatory Proposal Assessment (RPA) process, and finally came to some agreement on the broad composition of a proposed Canadian Organic Regime.

We are now using the word "regime" to align our system with international bureaucratic nomenclature. This kind of language will doubtless increase the deeper we become involved in the regulatory process, and we must be careful that such legalese does not erode the principles of organic farming. It is up to the Canadian organic community to keep a watchful eye on this as the process moves forward. The salient points from the proposed regime:

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) will become the "competent authority" for the Canadian Organic Regime.

An advisory body (government/organic sector partnership) will manage the standard, the accreditation and certification criteria and the regulation itself. It is understood that the advisory body will be able to use outside technical resources in this process.

The "competent authority" will determine the accreditation agency (or agencies) for the proposed regime. Provinces with regulatory programs will develop agreements with the federal government that will allow enforcement of the regulation at the provincial level.

Accredited certification bodies will provide the operator (farmer, processor, and handler) certification.

The CFIA, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will manage import control measures.

Accredited CBs, provincial governments, and the CFIA will all play a role in monitoring the regulation.

The CFIA will be responsible for enforcement of infractions that are beyond the scope of CBs.

The CFIA will be responsible to ensure recognition of the regime by foreign countries.

The CFIA will be the primary agency responsible for communication about the regime.

The advisory body will be responsible to ensure that an optional national symbol is developed and maintained.

How will this affect BC? Production issues are in the realm of the provinces, while trade issues are in the realm of the federal government. An organic regulation encompasses both production and trade issues – so, as with many other regulations, agreements must be developed between the provinces and federal government. It is in such agreements that BC will be able to maintain control of the organic designation within the province.

BC will be requested to maintain the original goals of the regulatory process:

- Mandatory
- Affordable
- Compliant with the Canadian federal system (shared provincial/federal responsibilities)
- Mutual recognition agreements (within Canada and internationally)
- An optional national symbol for marketing

How we will accomplish these goals is up to the organic sector to determine. There will be consultation meetings across Canada starting in January 2004. Come to BC's Organic Future 2004 in Naramata February 27, 28 to participate in the BC consultation session. You can also send your comments or questions to me at 250-747-3287 <paddy@quesnelbc.com> ✓

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Getting in Hot Water

Hot Water Treatment of Vegetable Seed – an Alternative Seed Treatment Method To Control Seed-borne Pathogens in Organic Farming, published in the *Journal of Plant Diseases and Protection* 110 (3), 2003 by E. Nega, R. Ulrish, S. Werner and M. Jahn.

This work was done in Germany over three years for carrot, cabbage, celery, parsley and lamb's lettuce seed. They tested hot water treatments of 40°C and 50-55°C for 10 to 60 minutes. They found that seed borne pathogens could be reduced without significant losses of germination at 50°C for 20 to 30 minutes and at 53°C for 10 to 30 minutes. At higher temperatures and/or for longer times germination was reduced. Cabbage seed was the most sensitive of those tested to too high temperatures or too long treatment time. Temperatures of 40°C or less had no effect on the seed-borne pathogens even at longer treatment times. An exact temperature had to be maintained during the treatment. Also

a decrease in temperature had to be avoided at the beginning of the treatment. Seeds were wrapped in cheesecloth bags and agitated in hot water in a tank with a heater. The water was kept at a uniform temperature using a thermostat. After the treatment, the seed was dried on drying lofts.

The pathogens controlled included *Alternaria species*, *Phoma species*, *Septoria species* and *Botrytis cinerea*. Hot water at 50°C for 30 minutes was effective for control of *Xanthomonas* on cabbage and carrots. There was also high efficacy against *Erysiphe heraclei* and *Fusarium species* on parsley seed. These treatments reduced *Peronospora valerianelle* in trials on weakly infested seeds but were ineffective on highly infested seed. Results were assessed on the basis of both the reduction of disease incidence and death of plants and with increased yield.

Composting Affects Boron

Effect of Composted Organic Matter on Boron Uptake by Plants by U. Yermiyahu, R. Keren and Y Chen, published in the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* V65 #5 Sept-Oct 2002

Boron is an essential micronutrient required for growth of most plants. However, the range of boron concentrations in the soil causing either deficiency or toxicity symptoms in plants is very narrow. The amount of boron taken up by plants depends not on the boron levels in the soil but in the soil solution (think soil moisture). In this study done in Israel, the role of organic matter content on the amount of boron in the soil solution and uptake by bell peppers was studied.

The organic matter used was mature compost made from straw and cattle manure. Plants were grown in a soil-sand compost mix containing 0, 1, 3, 6, or 10% compost by weight. Four levels of boron were applied to each combination and the soil was analyzed for boron content at the beginning of the trial and after harvest. Boron content in the leaves was determined 45 days after planting. What they found was that boron concentration in the soil solution at the beginning



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of the experiment decreased with increasing amounts of compost. This decrease was most prominent at high levels of boron application. Not too surprisingly the levels of boron in the leaves declined with increasing levels of compost even at high levels of boron application. There was also a high degree of correlation between boron concentration in the leaves and boron concentration in the soil solution. Boron deficiencies can definitely occur in soils with high organic matter because the organic matter adsorbs the boron and makes it unavailable for plant uptake. This is thought to be much less the case in acidic to near neutral pH soils than in high pH soils. In a soil high in boron, addition of organic matter can reduce the boron availability to plants and possible toxicity. In sandy soils where leaching results in low total boron, additions of organic matter to the soil may also reduce leaching and increase boron nutrition of plants.

The plants used were bell peppers. However, I can think of no reason why this would not apply to most other annuals and perennials. Leaf and soil analysis for boron levels is something that should be done regularly to avoid either deficiencies or toxicities. Foliar sprays may be necessary if there is a boron deficiency in the crop but high levels of organic matter in the soil.

Watch your Wasp Suppliers!

Variation in Biological Parameters of *Trichogramma* Spp. Purchased from Commercial Suppliers in

the US. by V. Schmidt et al., published in *BioControl: Journal of the International Organization for Biological Control* (48(5) October 2003.



The researchers purchased the same parasitic wasp species from 12 different commercial insectaries. They were to be delivered in the dormant pupal stage to emerge after arrival. Delivery times varied from 1 to 5 days and most shipped the insects with cold packs. The shorter the delivery time, the lower emergence in transit. Cold packs were also essential for this purpose.

Emergence in transit varied from 1 to 88%. Because *Trichogramma* have such a short life span, many or all of these were dead upon arrival. In some cases no wasps emerged during

or after transit and in one case the wrong insect had been sent. Wasps from some of the shipments lived 3 or more days longer than those from others. The researchers concluded that only buying from suppliers with very good quality control and handling methods plus able to deliver ideally in a day or two was highly recommended.

A year ago, I ordered some *Aphidoletes* through our local farm supply office to do some experiments in aphid control. Out of what was supposed to be 50,000 insects, a grand total of about 20 actually emerged. It turned out the farm supply had started purchasing through a supplier that brought the pupae in from Holland! I will never know for sure why the pupae died but in the future I will deal only with suppliers which buy from local insectaries. And will continue to closely monitor the quality of what I receive. ✓

SP BUSINESS SERVICES

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100,000 slices of apple

by Linda Edwards

With about 800 acres planted around Cawston/Keremeos, in order to not compete too much against each other (and all go broke) we have had to develop markets outside the area. So last year and this, a contingent of organic Ambrosia growers from Cawston and Keremeos went off to the Royal Winter Fair, taking our apples to Eastern Canada where most of the people in this country live.

From 9AM to 9 PM for 10 days we handed out at least 100,000 slices of Ambrosia to the throngs of people who passed by our booth.

The effort was well worth it. Many people could not believe the apples were organic – they were too beautiful – where are the scab blemishes etc.? The head produce manager from one of the biggest chains in the east committed to start stocking Ambrosia. Just as important, we reached the children – 8000 kids attend the Royal each day. One little girl, after eating a

slice of apple, put down her Gold Fish biscuits, took another slice and left the biscuits behind.

We also sent six forty pound boxes to the Toronto Food Bank school lunch program.

We want to give a special thanks to ProOrganics who kept us supplied with fruit.

Finally who paid for the air fare, hotel rooms and rental of the booth space? Two years ago, a mandatory levy of \$1 a box on the new Ambrosia apples variety was imposed by a vote of all Ambrosia growers, conventional and organic. The money is to promote the apple and to carry out research and quality control programs. Money raised from organic growers was set aside for organic growers to spend on initiatives such as the Royal, and a project to determine better nutrient management. The program ends with this year's crop.



Inspector Training in Naramata, BC

COABC is sponsoring two IOIA Certified Organic Inspector Training sessions this spring in Naramata. Trainings will be held in conjunction with the COABC conference, and training participants are encouraged to attend sessions at the conference.

IOIA Basic Farm Inspector Training

February 24-27, 2004

This training will have a unique regional focus and use COABC standards while still covering the basic IOIA curriculum including organic farm inspection protocols, investigative skills, risk assessment, auditing farm yields, use of approved materials, report writing and on-farm processing. The Basic training will include a mock inspection to a local orchard, vineyard or greenhouse.

IOIA Advanced Inspector Training

March 1-2, 2004

Advanced Training will be responsive to needs of provincial inspectors and certifiers. Potential topics include inspector ISO compliance requirements, food safety, conducting label reviews, advanced auditing and understanding NOP requirements for Canadian exporters.

www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca or contact:

Kristen Kane
COABC office
#8-A 100 Kalamalka Lake Rd. Vernon BC V1T 9G1
ph: 250-260-4429 • fax: (250) 260-4436
email: coabc@bcgrizzly.com

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BC's Organic Future 2004

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For information, registration, accommodation, please contact:

Kristen Kane

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