

BC

Organic Grower

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Columbia
Certified
Organic*



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COABC 3402 32nd Ave. Vernon BC V1T 2N1

President's Message

by Deb Foote

It's hard to believe that it is already spring. I hope you found some down time over the winter to regroup for the coming season. I am already seeing local greens showing up at the stores so no doubt some of you have been busy for the last couple of months.

The COABC has a busy year ahead. Besides the work that Paddy continues to do with respect to the National Standards, we have recently identified that we have a chunk of work to do to bring our standards and the accreditation program up to date to meet the new ISO requirements for Accreditation Bodies (ISO 17011). To that end Paddy and Anne Macey (the chair of the COABC Accreditation Board) visited with the deputy minister in Victoria just after the AGM. The purpose of this visit was to ask for money from the government to assess the changes that will be required to meet 17011, as well as to review our standards against the Canadian National Standard. All indications are that this money will be forth coming, and the work is scheduled to begin in early May.

The Board of Directors has just wrapped up our annual retreat held at Mount Baldy in the Boundary Region. We invited Patrick Mallet (past president) to facilitate the process. The purpose of the retreat was to set the direction of the board for the next year. We spent time discussing Board responsibilities, strategic direction, board staff relations, lines of communication and policy development. A number of committees were struck to deal with issues that came out of these discussions. There is lots of work ahead of for the board and staff. We will keep you in the loop as new developments arise.

On the National Standards, Paddy has indicated in his March report that the standards are scheduled to go to "Gazette" by the end of April and that there will be a comment period after which the next step will be for Cabinet

Committee approval. Paddy has had the good fortune of being able to communicate this directly to our new Minister of Agriculture Chuck Strahl. Minister Strahl has indicated that he is supportive of moving ahead.



On the provincial front we continue to work with BCMAL on in a number of areas, one of which deals with the issue of compensation for growers effected by spraying for West Nile should there be an order from the BC Centre for Disease Control. You will notice in this issue that there is a proposed standard change regarding Government Mandate Pest and Disease Treatment standard, it is important that you send in your comments before the end of the comment period so that the Standards Review committee has your input prior to making their recommendation to the Board of Directors. There will be a Special Meeting in June that will determine the final outcome of this process. Once we have the standard change in place we will be concluding these discussions.

Well folks, it's off to work for me! Here is to another profitable growing season! ✓

National Standards, ISO Accreditation, Compensation for government spray programs, new Standard proposals

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Cuba e3 Home

by Kirsten Kane

Hello and Happy Spring! I trust you all are super busy getting everything ready for planting, or working like mad in your greenhouses... for some reason the winter seemed to hang on extra long, and I for one am anxious for some sun and warmth right about now.

Speaking of sun and warmth, like your editor, I was very fortunate to travel to Cuba in February to witness firsthand the impressive and inspiring work in Participatory Plant Breeding executed by the country's farmers and scientists. With very little to work with, and in sometimes very difficult terrain, the farmers are breeding their own varieties of indigenous vegetables and experiencing tremendous yields and much success.

One farmer in particular has devised an elaborate terracing system on his (very steep) hillside farm to maximise run-off for irrigation while minimising water erosion. He grows a tremendous variety of crops, and is proud that his yields and the size of vegetables produced are consistently much bigger than that of his neighbour, who has not yet figured out the secret. 'Local innovation' is the buzz phrase in Cuba, and successful farmers are working with the country's universities and agricultural institutions to devise means of maximising production with minimal inputs or mechanical assistance.

My trip was generously funded through the United Nations Development Program, and I was so grateful for this life-altering experience. Cuba is an unbelievably beautiful, textured place and I would urge anyone who has an opportunity to join Ron Pither on one of his trips to this amazing place to do so.

February was indeed a busy month for me – upon returning from Cuba, I almost immediately travelled to Abbotsford for the Pacific Agriculture Show. COABC was running an Organic Sector Development Project called 'Organics 101' which featured seminars on organic vegetable and berry production as well as an introduction to certification for non-organic producers. We were pleased to see a tremendous turnout for these seminars, and were able to provide additional information to attendees at our booth on the show floor. The Ag. Show is a fabulous opportunity to connect with everyone in Agriculture, and the trade show itself is quite spectacular. Many thanks to

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www.CertifiedOrganic.bc.ca

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Next Issue Deadline: July 1, 2005

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Mary Forstbauer and family, Sarah Davidson (and another COABC grower who does not wish to be identified) for the hours of volunteer time and enthusiasm they put in at the COABC booth.

The Ag. Show was followed of course by the COABC AGM and conference. As always it was great to reconnect with the board and the many growers who attended the event. Thank you to our event organiser Michelle Boshard and our many generous sponsors who ensured that all who attended were well fed, well entertained, and well informed by the brilliant speakers. Next year, the event will move to the interior of the province as per tradition, and we hope that you all will make the trek to see us.

March was a month full of housekeeping in the office on the administrative front, and in April, I am once again on the road. British Columbia Agriculture Day organised by the BC Agricultural Council is a great opportunity to

lobby our people in Victoria on the issues near and dear to us, a directors' retreat in Oliver provided a great opportunity for the board to come together, strategise and explore the future direction of COABC, and the Canadian Health Food Association's Expo West show in Vancouver will allow COABC and its certifiers to make connections with the trade, and hopefully sell some certification.

At this time we are also starting to make plans for COABC's newest annual event, the Organic Harvest Awards. We hope to change the format slightly, and expect that this year the OHA will be bigger and better than the inaugural event in 2005. Watch for details regarding applications and sponsorship opportunities. We thank you in advance for your support.

We are well into spring, and heading into a busy summer - there are many projects and opportunities in the works and I look forward to keeping you informed as they develop.



Regional Seminar Series

Interested in **demonstrating the latest farming techniques or equipment to farmers?** Looking for some **financial support** to get this kind of hands-on event off the ground?

The COABC's Organic Sector Development Fund has approved funding to support a set of regionally oriented seminars around the province. These events must demonstrate something new that can help producers increase their organic productivity.

If you have an idea, and a CB or a regional production group who will help coordinate the event, talk to Rochelle Eisen to see if you qualify for financial assistance. You can reach us:

Rochelle Eisen

250.547.6573 (h)

250.306.7980 (c) or

via email *rare@telus.net*.

COABC Board 2006

BCARA: Les Bohna. Alternate: Brad Reid

Bio-Dynamics: Jasmin Schellenberg. Alternate: Mary Forstbauer

BOPA: Sonia Stairs (COABC Vice President)
Alternate: Owen Broad

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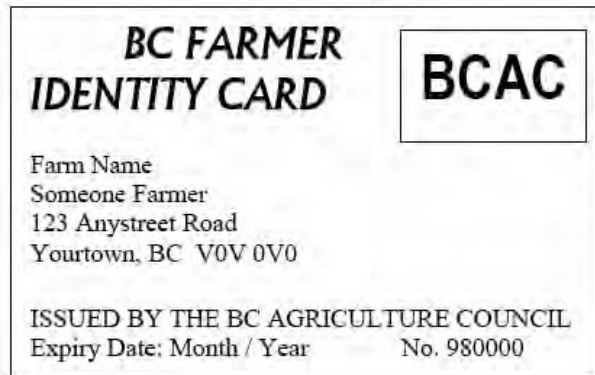
Farm Plates

For the past year, Autoplan has only been issuing farm plates to bona-fide farmers. In order to obtain farm plates for your motor vehicles, you must have obtained farm status from the BC Assessment Authority and you must be able to prove this to Autoplan. Autoplan agents will accept a copy of your tax assessment notice, or a BC Agricultural Council Farmer ID Card.

The ID card also makes it easier to buy PST exempt supplies, as it is proof of your farm status.

The Farmer ID Card is available from BCAC. You can call them and they will send you an application, or you can download an applica-

tion (or complete it online) at www.bcac.bc.ca. You will need to provide a copy of your property assessment notice.



COABC members (all members of COABC accredited certification bodies) receive a member's rate for the Farmer ID Card because COABC belongs to the BCAC. The fee is \$30, instead of \$75. The cards are valid for 3 years. Get the card from:

BC Agriculture Council
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Kelowna, BC V1Y 5V3
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Government Spray Options

by the Standards Review Committee

Due to overwhelming response, and the urgency of the issue, the Standards Review Committee is asking COABC members to respond to a revised proposal for government mandated pest treatment. These involve a substantial re-write, and the different proposals outlined below all have different approaches and consequences. Please consider carefully which of these would be the most appropriate for the COABC as a whole, and submit your comments to your SRC representatives (the list of reps is at the bottom of this page). Please submit comments in writing, to ensure that your views are accurately represented.

The following four options are being circulated for a 60-day comment period from 1 April to 30 May, 2006. Subsequent to this comment period, if the COABC membership who participate and the SRC feel we have a viable standard, the SRC will ask the Board of Directors to implement the standard effective immediately, rather than in January 2007, as allowed by Section 3.2.2.14 of Book 1 of the COABC Standards. The Board has approved this process, and is now awaiting your response.

For the technically minded, the proposed standard will be inserted after Section 2.13 Book 2 of the Standards, and will push the current standard 2.14 to 2.15.

Deadline for Response to the Standards Review Committee: May 30

The four options for revision on the so-called "emergency pest treatment standard" are:

Option 1

Withdrawal of the proposed standard 2.14 altogether, with no replacement. Our existing standards already cover the application of prohibited substances.

Option 2

Section 2.14 Government Mandated Pest or Disease Treatment

When a prohibited substance is applied or drifts onto an establishment because of a federal or provincial emergency pest or disease treatment program,

- a. the operator shall immediately notify her/his certification body, providing information on the substance applied, method, rate and location of application;

- b. the land shall undergo a 36 month transition to organic status;

- c. livestock which have been protected from direct exposure to the substance shall be governed by the relevant sections of the standards regarding feed and pasture.

Option 3

Section 2.14 Government Mandated Pest or Disease Treatment (based on National Standard)

When a prohibited substance is applied on an establishment because of a federal or provincial emergency pest or disease treatment program, and when the establishment otherwise meets the requirements of the standard, the status shall not be affected, provided the operator complies with the following conditions:

- a. the operator shall immediately notify her/his certification body, providing information on the substance applied, method,

Standards Review Committee Representatives

PACS: Rebecca Kneen, Donna Bartlett, Fred Danenhower, Mary Ballon

BCARA: Sarah Davidson

BOPA: Rick Lewellyn

FVOPA: Dave Fontaine

IOPA: David Wiebe

KOGS: Abra Brynne

LEOGA: Lee McFadyen

NOOA: Cara Nunn

SOOPA: Yuri Zebroff

STOPA: Marnie Lyons

Bio Dynamic Association: Mary Forstbauer

rate and location of application;

b. any harvested crop or plant part harvested within 12 months of the treatment shall not be sold, labelled nor represented as organically produced, nor fed to livestock, nor used as mulch on land under organic management;

c. any livestock or poultry exposed to a prohibited substance applied as the result of a federal or provincial emergency pest or disease treatment program, or any products derived from such livestock or poultry shall not be sold, labeled or represented as organically produced with the exception of:

i. milk or milk products produced more than 12 months after the last date that the dairy animal was exposed to the prohibited substance

ii. the offspring of gestating mammalian breeder stock treated with a prohibited substance shall be considered organic, if the breeder stock was not in the last third of gestation on the date that the breeder stock was exposed to the prohibited substance.

Option 4

Section 2.14 Government Mandated Pest or Disease Treatment

When a prohibited substance is applied on an establishment because of a federal or provincial emergency pest or disease treatment program, and when the establishment otherwise meets the requirements of the standard, the status shall not be affected, provided the operator complies with the following conditions:

a. the operator shall immediately notify her/his certification body, providing information on the date of application, substance applied, method, rate and location of application and government order under which the exposure occurred;

b. this information shall be attached to the organic certificate and the operator shall be responsible for informing the public of the spray through all possible means. This notification shall remain on the certificate for 36 months from the date of exposure.

How do we move forward?

These options represent a number of different approaches to the problem, which is government mandated spraying for West Nile virus, gypsy moth, or anything else deemed necessary to the maintenance of public health by the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control. The Standards Review Committee is also suggesting that the Board of Directors of COABC become more actively involved in the development of preventative strategies (particularly in the case of West Nile) with the provincial government to prevent contamination in the first place. We are also suggesting that legal support be sought on behalf of our membership in case of contamination, for compensation. We look forward to hearing from you further. Written responses are required, as they help us better represent your views.



Gypsy Moth Spray Abandoned

Good News! The Ministry of Forests withdrew the application to aerial spray 370 ha of Saltspring Island with BTK Foray 48B for Gypsy Moth eradication.

Instead they agreed to the community's made-on Saltspring alternative - an intensive egg mass search of high risk locations with 300 volunteers before the end of March; ground-spraying of a much smaller area with Dipel (the formulation allowed for organic production) and mass pheromone trapping for male moths during the summer. The community is also committed to a public campaign to increase awareness to help prevent future introductions.

Delta Larvicide Program

The Corporation of Delta has implemented a program to attack mosquito larvae using BT applied directly to larvae in streams and ditches. This kind of pro-active strategy could be adopted by any municipality, and would greatly decrease the need for spraying adulticides as currently proposed.

For more information you can present to your regional government, go to the pest management area of Delta's website, at

www.corp.delta.bc.ca/EN/main/residents/771/772/pest_management.html



Mud, Glorious Mud!

by Elaine Spearing

Reconciling Happy Pigs with Healthy Soils

I was on a field trip in the North Okanagan a couple of years ago with a group of agriculturalists, when we happened to pass a herd of sows grazing in a pasture. The bus was stopped in order to enjoy the unusual sight. "Wow," said one woman, "I thought that keeping pigs outside was illegal!"

On organic farms outdoor pigs are a common sight, as they weed, clear ground, consume farm wastes and provide manure. However, there is no specific environmental regulation of outside pigs in B.C. Like any other farm enterprise, pig production is subject to the Code of Agricultural Practice for Waste Management, which describes agricultural practices for using, storing and managing agricultural waste in a manner that is environmentally sound.

Keeping pigs on pasture or on fallow areas of garden can be a balancing act, but with common sense and careful site selection the principles of animal welfare and good soil management can be reconciled.

Site Selection

The main environmental and soil management issues associated with outdoor pigs are soil erosion, soil compaction, run-off and nutrient losses. Each situation is different according to soil type, stocking rate, slope, and distance from a watercourse or depth to groundwater.

Heavier soils are most at risk from compaction and associated runoff. The more compacted a

soil becomes, the more its sponge-like abilities to absorb rainfall are reduced. Lighter soils are more at risk from erosion and nutrient leaching. On all soils, slopes, distance from wells and the depth to the water table should be taken into consideration when deciding where to locate pigs, and at what stocking rate. Outdoor pig areas should be sited an adequate distance away from watercourses (see the Code) with additional distance or vegetative buffers if there is still any risk of run-off reaching a watercourse.



Health and welfare must also be considered. A good water supply is essential, to ensure adequate drinking water and maintenance of mud baths in the summer months. Mobile huts/housing for warmth, shelter and shade facilitate rotation of a site for pigs and spread the impact on a site through a season. Adequate rotation is also needed to avoid parasite build-up, especially on farrowing or weaning paddocks.

Sloping ground for farrowing paddocks should be avoided, to prevent piglet deaths due to nest movement.



Nutrient Management

The manure deposited by pigs contains valuable nutrients that can be utilised by crops/grass growing after the pigs have moved on. However, nitrogen and phosphorus in particular can, if deposited in excess of crop needs, leach into creeks or groundwater. Some areas of the province where creeks run into

lakes (eg. the Okanagan) are phosphorous sensitive, as phosphorous building up in surface waters can upset the ecological balance.

Manure deposited by pigs is a valuable contribution to soil fertility, but how much is too much? The code of agricultural practice provides a framework to consider this, in addition to other risks. Following is a way of assessing

the available nitrogen load going onto the soil in the pigs manure.

If the pigs are grazing on crops and receiving all or most of their nutrition from the land, there is no risk of nutrient overload.

If the pigs are confined by fences or topography, most or all feed is brought to the livestock and deposited manure nutrients exceed crop need (if a crop is grown at all), this is defined as an outdoor confined area, and excess manure must be removed to be applied to land as a fertiliser.

If the pigs are receiving supplementary feed on an area also used for crop production, most of the feed is brought to the site, and manure nutrients do not exceed crop needs, the nutrients can be treated like a regular manure application. This situation is the most common for a group of weaner pigs kept on grass or fallow garden areas over a season.

Values listed in the Environmental Farm Plan Reference Guide can be used to work out a nitrogen input at your stocking rate. This can be taken into account together with your soil type and the crop following the pigs, to assess if manure input may be in excess.

For example, Assumed weaner pig manure N excretion is 10kg/N/animal/year. For half a year, (one season spring-fall) = 5kgN/animal
10 weaners on 1 acre (0.4 ha) = 50kg N per acre (0.4ha)

This figure can be compared with with, typical annual N uptake of crops, eg.

Perennial grass in interior 80-161 KgN/acre
(For nutrient budgeting enthusiasts with small areas, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet.)

On grass, retaining as much intact turf as possible will reduce risk of nutrient leaching, in addition to reducing any risk of run-off or erosion. It will also help to reduce compaction and maintain soil structure. On crop land, giving enough time to re-seed in the fall to estab-

Pigs—continued on page 10...

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...Pigs—continued from page 9

lish vegetative cover as soon as possible after pigs have come off land will do the same. Pigs do not deposit manure uniformly, and systematic relocation of hut and feeder points will reduce surplus nutrient deposits at any given point.

Wallows

Pigs kept outside are vulnerable to overheating and it is important that they have access to shade in sunny weather. At times extra heat loss via evaporation is needed. Mud is important for this, and also sunburn can be minimised by the layer of mud on the body.

Providing a wallow meets the needs of pigs but is a horror scene for a market grower carefully nurturing their soil's structure. Some solutions

I have come across are access to a concrete area designed to hold mud a bit like a silt trap, metal 'mud baths', or a permanent sacrifice area. Sometimes, though, apart from careful siting of the wallow the only solution for sensitive soil-builders may be to gain consolation from happy pigs and avert their gaze as they walk past!

Further Reading

Site Suitability for Outdoor Pig Farming

The Canada-British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Program Reference Guide. B.C. Agricultural Council

Site and Farm Suitability and Health

www.organic-vet.reading.ac.uk/pigweb/health/site.htm

Breeding system on grass

Profitable Pork: Strategies for Hog Producers – pigs on pasture



Stay of Execution for Slaughterhouses

by Cathleen Kneen

The Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Pat Bell, has announced a stay of execution for the province's slaughterhouses. The date for implementation of the Ministry of Health's Meat Inspection Regulation is being extended by one year to September 30, 2007. In addition, the government is providing money to help abattoir operators bring their facilities up to the new standards – retroactive to July 23, 2004 so operators who have already upgraded will also benefit.

The Ministry of Health will also extend the current policy of no inspection fees until 2012.

The bulk of the \$5 million fund will go to "bricks and mortar". The program will provide funding towards construction and equipment costs, feasibility studies and business plans of individual plants upgrading to provincial licensing. Operators interested in obtaining funding under the Individual Plant Assistance component must apply by September 30, 2006 through the BC Food Processors Association. The fund will also assist with the development of innovative or collaborative solutions, such as small-scale or mobile facilities, to meet local needs.

In addition, \$1 million of the new money will support the Meat Industry Enhancement

Strategy (MIES) to implement the Action Plan developed by the BC Food Processors Association. Key elements of the Action Plan include communications, the development of Mobile Abattoir Prototypes, assistance through the licensing process, and the facilitation processes to reach solutions for whole communities.

While all this is welcome news, organic farmers who have traditionally sold their animals directly to the final consumer –farm-gate sales– will now have to truck their animals to a slaughter-house if a licensed mobile unit is not available. Many continue to advocate that farm-gate sales, which pose minimal public health risk as the process is 100% transparent and traceable, should be exempted from the Regulation in the same way that slaughter of animals for the owner's personal consumption continues to be exempt.

For further information or to receive application packages for the meat transition assistance program, call Julie Labelle at the BCFPA, (250) 356-1660.

www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/protect/meat_inspection.html

www.bcfpa.ca/mies.html



Community Food Systems for Healthy Living

by Cathleen Kneen

One of the most popular presentations at the COABC annual conference in Abbotsford in February came from Jammi Kumar, First Nations Development Agrologist with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. Central to his presentation was a comparison between the existing food system and what he described as a community food system.

The existing food system, he said, is characterized by industrialized agriculture with centralized production, processing, and distribution. The emphasis is shifted from high quality, nutritious food to higher quantity, longer shelf life, and better looks. Corporate control has replaced producer control over production and marketing, and the producer's share in the food dollar has dropped from 41% in 1950 to 6% in 2000. Heavy use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides has led to environmental degradation, exacerbated by the increased emissions from the transportation of food over long distances.

There are serious health effects of this food system. There is increased consumption of processed foods, while remote, rural areas are not able to access fresh, locally grown food. The health-care system is staggering under the weight of high incidence of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and cancer — and increased dependence on pharmaceutical solutions further weaken natural immune systems.

In fact, this runs parallel to the increased dependence in industrial agriculture on synthetic herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers. Again, the natural systems are weakened, with spiralling negative effects.

A community food system, on the other hand, would integrate food (production, processing, distribution, consumption) and health (environmental, economic, social, nutritional). Agriculture and food would become an integral part of the overall economic strategy of rural communities, which would aim at self-sustenance and sustainable use of natural resources. In his own work with First Nations

communities, Kumar helps facilitate local food production, using existing, un-used land resources and unemployed local people and emphasizing organic and less energy-intensive practices. There are a number of projects underway to develop market-oriented food and agriculture-related businesses that create jobs, re-circulate financial capital in the community, and contribute to the community's economic development. Other projects promote traditional foods through local food processing and preparation, along with community and market gardens for local self-sustenance.

One example is the development of the BC First Nations Hemp Industry, which started as a pilot project. This project is being commercialized this year in 100 Mile House. It's a partnership between the District of 100 Mile House and the First Nations. The project is expected to go beyond production into processing and marketing of multiple products ranging from burl boards to hemp oil and protein meal. The vision includes a wide variety of harvesting, production, processing and marketing projects from berries to beef, all aimed at increasing the health and economic self-reliance of First Nations communities.

The motto that Kumar proposed works equally well for non-Natives, too:

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Canada Organic Standard

by Paddy Doherty

We have reached a historic moment in the development of the standard, although it feels anticlimactic. The technical committee had until April 7th to address any outstanding issues. Most of the responses suggest that these issues will be dealt with in the 'future work list'. As of April 7th the standard has become a final draft and now proceeds to "Second Level Approval Stage." This stage is managed by the "Panel on Process Assurance" and is an internal CGSB procedure—at this point, the standard is out of our hands. I am optimistic we may see a completed standard by June.

In March, six delegates from the Organic Regulatory Committee (ORC) met with the

President of the CFIA, Francois Guimont. Mr. Guimont was genial and enthusiastic for the implementation of the organic regulation. We had an interesting discussion, especially when Francois heard from Terry Ackerman that the Canadian organic industry is growing at 20% per year and that this growth is expected for some time. Mr Guimont was very impressed. He summed up his feeling about the regulation that he is "looking forward to briefing the Minister on this file." He indicated that it is unheard of for an industry to be united in asking for a regulation--that the organic regulation is a good news story when agriculture is full of bad news stories.

Work is continuing on the development of a national organic council. The council, once formed, will manage the standard, regulation, and permitted substances list for the organic sector. COABC will need to find a way to include the entire BC organic sector in order to delegate one person to sit on our behalf on this council.

The only outstanding issue now is the Canada Organic trademark, which is currently owned by the COAB (Canada Organic Advisory Board). Since the COAB has been dormant for some time, we are hopeful that the directors will agree to transfer ownership to the ORC which picked up the pioneering work of the COAB on the national standard and has brought it to this point. ✓

Founder's Award

COABC was honoured this year to present the Founder's Award to Susan Davidson. Susan lives on a 20 acre co-operatively owned farm in Aldergrove, where the Glorious Garnish and Seasonal Salad Co. Ltd. has been growing organic salads, flower,



herbs, fruits and vegetables since 1985. As one of the founding members of the BC Association for Regenerative Agriculture, she helped develop standards and a verification program for certifying organic farms in the Fraser Valley starting in 1990.

Susan has been gardening since childhood. She is also an inspired cook, and author of *Down to Earth*, a workbook that addresses the question, "How do I cook that?". Susan is an inspired peacemaker, passionate about ecologically sound farming, and a genuine leader and mentor in the organic movement. ✓



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Tooth Fairy Bird

by Martin Williams and Nial Moores

Surely one of the most startling of the flurry of new findings made during the spread of H5N1 avian influenza has been the discovery of the Tooth Fairy Bird – which we believe is the first bird species to have been initially described by virologists, and is remarkable for being able to survive and sustain and spread H5N1. Here, we present a review of information on this intriguing taxon.

Perhaps a single existing bird species, perhaps a closely or remotely related grouping of bird species, the Tooth Fairy Bird has never been certainly recorded, but like esoteric sub-atomic particles its existence has been inferred through a variety of indirect means. By drawing on reports from virologists, agriculture and health officials and journalists – though as yet, alas, not ornithologists and birders – it is possible to describe the behaviour of this unusual bird. In brief, the Tooth Fairy Bird is capable of both surviving infection by a strain of H5N1 that is otherwise highly lethal to all species it infects, and of flying long distances, efficiently spreading the virus at only few places it visits. Curiously, rather than follow major migration timings and flyways, it often flies long distances when many birds are not migrating, and has a strong tendency to follow railway lines and roads. Further, once the Tooth Fairy Bird has introduced the virus to a new area, it then plays little or no role in spreading the virus there; indeed, it may quickly vanish altogether.

The Tooth Fairy Bird – basic facts

Known Occurrences: Never recorded with certainty.

First reported in East Asia several years ago, though ancestral forms have previously been considered possibly present, the Tooth Fairy Bird seems to be a species still really known only to scientists, experts and newspaper jour-

nalists, and is already found in the annals of the FAO, WHO and other august bodies with names made up of two or three letters.

Appearance: Unknown, though perhaps duck-like.

Habitats: Although considered by some to be part-waterbird part-seabird, it seems to feed or breed almost entirely near (or even in) chicken farms.

Migration Routes: Said to be from China through Siberia, down through Europe into Nigeria and then up across the Arctic Circle into America, and presumably, following logical assumption, back round through Indonesia into

China. Shows a curious tendency to follow railway lines, roads and smuggling routes.

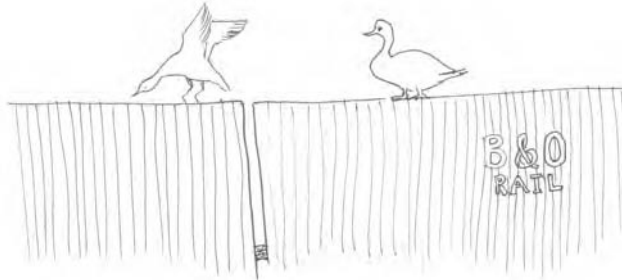
Range: Initially said to occur at two urban parks in Hong Kong, it subsequently spread through much of East Asia. More recently, has spread to Europe and Africa, yet has become extinct in its former range in East Asia including Hong Kong.

Behaviour: It is an aggressive species, with a strong tendency to sneeze, cough and spit, especially on or by poultry in farms, and on ducks or swans that are invariably at wetlands near poultry farms.

Birdlife International classification: Though regarded by many non-ornithological authorities as Highly or Near-threatening, the Tooth Fairy Bird is classed by Birdlife International as Non-existent, without actual scientific proof.

Dr Martin Williams is a Hong Kong-based writer and conservationist who has led migration studies in eastern China, Nial Moores is director of Birds Korea

excerpted from: <www.drmartinwilliams.com/component/option,com_simpleboard/Itemid,137/func,view/cattid,7/id,512/#512>



"a strong tendency to follow railway lines"



Belgian Chocolate for Plants

by Cara Nunn

When Carl Van Vlerken left Holland in 1997, his goal was to have 100 cows within 10 years. By the year 2000 Carl's dreams had been realized three fold. Carl, his partner Sue and their blended family of ten bought a 75 cow operation in Enderby shortly after arriving in Canada and then bought up the neighbour's quota when it came on the market. They now operate the 320 head Black Forest Dairy.

By employing the environmental care that they learned in Europe, the production of the dairy is 10-12% higher than a conventional dairy. The success of the dairy is shared by the entire family with a role for each to play. With kids ranging in age from 10 – 22, the skills brought to the operation are varied. All facets of the business, from web design to marketing to milking, are attended to by different family members.

Four years ago the family decided to diversify their operation and continue with the environ-

mental imperative developed in the old country. With more than 300 head of cows producing 14 yards of solid manure daily, something needed to be done. The family decided to create a plant to produce top quality composted cow manure as an offshoot of their dairy operation. Terra Futura Organics – or soil of the future – is the name that the compost is marketed under. "We preserve the environment for the future" says Carl whose investment in the future is reflected in his kids' involvement in the business.

The family created a million dollar state-of-the-art plant where automation takes the fresh manure through a weeks-long process of aeration and mixing to fully "cook" the manure. The OMRI certified process begins when the manure solids are mixed with the additive-free wood shavings from the bedding in the calving and rearing barns. It is then moved to the composting barn and placed in one of three 200 foot channels each 20 feet wide and 5 feet deep. Air is infused through the floor every 10 minutes while a large windrow turner moves from one end of the channel to the other turning the soil and slowly moving it down the channel.

After several weeks the original mixture arrives at the other end and is then moved to a second channel for curing. The curing process follows the same aeration and turning process for a further 60 days turning the manure into the dark rich compost that is the Belgian chocolate for plants.

Three years ago the family chose to have OMRI certification for their product allowing them to market the compost to Certified Organic growers. This enterprise has surprised and delighted the family with its tremendous success. With all the current press that they are experiencing the business is about to take off again. At the time of our interview Sue had just completed a deal to have large quantities of her compost used in the manufacture of compost tea. Sue had never heard of compost tea before this year. "With the level of technology in our world, it was the newspapers that brought this success to us."



The local availability of rich organic compost looks inviting to those farms that lack the resources to produce on farm compost sufficient to meet the soil stewardship requirement of Organic Certification. While we await further developments our plants can enjoy their "chocolate". The compost is marketed as Terra Futura Organics and sold by a 20 liter bag or by the yard for bulk quantities. ✓

Comments on Composting

In any event it is important to identify the sources of materials that were used in making a batch of compost for sale into the certified organic system. A complete nutrient analysis should be given and should include the salt content.

There is a need for strict avoidance of urban wastes, heavy metal contamination, synthetic compost starters, and contaminated wood waste and paper products. These are in the current standards largely because they were of a concern at the time of the writing of the standard in BC. If the standards were written in BC at the present time I have little doubt that the standards would make more explicit references to the contamination of manures with GMO's, the concern over disease transfer, and the ever increasing complexity of chemical use in conventional animal production.

Proper composting is a viable and valuable way of breaking down many organic compounds and is an effective way of destroying disease organisms and other pathogens. However, the increasing concentration and density employed by conventional animal production and the rapid approval of products used in conventional agriculture are raising serious concerns for organic agriculture.

Fred Reid, www.organics.bc.ca ✓

Residues removed by composting

A recent research project indicates that composting is an effective method of removing antibiotics from animal manures. Using

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manure from beef calves treated with Oxytetracycline (OTC), the researchers found that levels of OTC were reduced by 95% within the first six days of composting. In contrast, levels of extractable OTC in room temperature incubated and sterilized mixtures decreased only 12 - 25% after 37 and 35 days, respectively.

They also found that levels of total bacteria in the finished compost mixture were roughly 30-fold higher than levels in the mixture prior to composting, while OTC-resistant bacteria were 10-fold lower. Although the basis of the OTC disappearance during composting is not known, the preponderance of OTC-sensitive bacteria and the decrease of OTC-resistant bacteria in the finished compost suggests that OTC residues have been rendered biologically inactive or unavailable.

Composting Rapidly Reduces Levels of Extractable Oxytetracycline in Manure from Therapeutically Treated Beef Calves by O. Arian, L. Sikora, S Khan and G. Foster, Bioresource Technology, 17/11/05 ✓

Organic Dairy Herd Health

by Dr. Paul Dettloff, DVM

Dairy cows are subject to natural dips in immune system functioning that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating herd health and treatment.

Managing the dry cow starts during the last trimester of lactation. This is the period when the bovine should be gaining back her body condition after coming off her lactation curve. The last thing anyone wants in a dry-off is an animal that is skin and bone. On the flip side, you do not want an animal that is hog-fat going into her dry period. The last trimester is when you want to control the grain so you can get her body condition where you want it.

A key factor the dairyman must know and be very aware of during the dry period is the two dips in immune function that all female herbivores experience. Immunologists uncovered this in the 1980s, and it has been a well-kept secret in the dairy industry. The two dips take place as follows. At dry-off, the immune function is lowered by the endocrine system. A tight udder triggers the endocrine system to hormonally switch from a lactating animal. The second, bigger and longer drop starts about two weeks before calving and bottoms out at calving. It

The fundamentals of dry cow management

will take two to three weeks to return to normal. Experts say that in some cows 75 percent of immune function is shut down.

If possible any stress should be avoided during these two times of lowered immune function.

Vaccinations should be avoided during dry-off and around freshening.

Unfortunately, these two time frames have been widely adopted as times to vaccinate for everything and anything in the dairy world. Avoid these windows at all costs.

The dry cow should have a high-forage diet with at least 10 pounds of dry hay for good rumen function. The potassium level in the forage should be monitored. A correct balance is to approach a one-to-one ratio with calcium and potassium. This may be hard to do. If one can get the calcium levels above 1 percent to 1.4 percent on a dry matter basis and the potassium in the low 2 percent range this is acceptable.

Minerals, calcium and phosphorus should always be available free choice. The ratios will be determined by the forages fed. A good level of selenium and traces should be available also. In the winter, a good level of vitamins should be supplemented. A target figure would be to have your animals on 100,000 to 200,000 IU (international units) of vitamin A per head per day. The vitamins D and E should be supplemented as well.

Because of the natural dips in the immune system, if you want to upgrade immune function follow these tips:

If you are ever going to want to kick up the cow's immune system for one month to affect the next 11 months, the time to do it is the four weeks just before calving. I



prefer 2 ounces of kelp meal mixed 50% with Redmond Natural Salt. You can also put this in the TMR or some have chosen to just free choice it. Salt in the loose form should also be provided. I like the unrefined natural products.

A second way to put the immune system in high gear is to add some aloe vera pellets to the ration. Levels of two to four ounces are commonly used. More and more organic dairymen are using this during the big immune function dip. They typically start about two weeks before calving. The window starting one week after dry-off is the time to do your mastitis, somatic cell and dry-cow mastitis clean up. This is when you become proactive. Any high cell count or mastitis problem cow is attacked at this time.

I like to go on a regimen of a whey product SQ (subcutaneous) of about 30 cc by the tail head. Hit them with 300 cc oral drench of antioxidant tincture for three days. They should also go on a garlic tincture either orally or vaginally for three days. During this three-day time period,

strip them out two to four times a day to flush and clean the udder. If a few more days are required, continue with this regimen. This may be repeated in a few weeks when the udder has shrunk down.

Any animal that has had a history of udder trouble or has excessive udder swelling in the immediate pre-fresh state should be considered for pre-milking. Start 10 to 20 days before freshening if you suspect mastitis or just lots of edema. Bring her into the milking line, wash her up and spend some time massaging and washing her at first to stimulate oxytocin let-down. The first two or three times you may get nothing, but usually they will let down. Milk her to see what you have; if it is bad, keep milking and treating her. Go right up to and through calving. Colostrum will be there, as it is formed at calving and not before.

You are doing three things:

- Cleaning up the colostrum by getting the dead

Herd Health— continued on page 18...

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cells and debris (pus) out of the system.

- Cleaning out the mastitis and treating her at the same time.
- Reducing udder edema.

Do not use any whey products two weeks before calving as you may precipitate calving—whey can do this. Grain feeding to the dry cow is based on body conditioning as said previously, this is not the time to get them hog-fat. Introduction of a little grain before calving is fine for a thin cow or to get her slowly up to speed before calving. The less you disturb a cow during her four-week immune dip the better off you are.

When I am consulting and encounter a high-production, high-grain, highly acidic, overly vaccinated BGH herd I will focus on the three weeks after calving to evaluate what level their immune function is at, and invariably their sick cows and death loss will be

highest shortly after calving. Organic graziers and high-forage feeders may not realize the many long-term benefits you get by raising your cows' immune function. Prevention is a key strategy and reducing stress during this critical time will go a long way towards improving the overall health of the herd.

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Managing Soil Structure for Profit

by Robert Dixon

Research shows that good soil structure can be worth a 5 - 10% benefit to yield¹, but how can farmers build good soil structure? What can producers monitor to see if farming practices are building up good soil tilth?

There are no agreed upon indicators of soil structure (one part of a healthy soil) that are being regularly used by growers, certifiers or organic inspectors. I put together Rob's Tilth Indicator, with its 11 measures, to help me understand how tillage operations and organic matter management are affecting the soil aggregates on farms during organic inspections.

Farmers think of good tilth as how easily a soil works up but soil researchers talk, instead, about aggregate stability. Both observations are the visible results of a well fed and actively growing soil life. How do you make these mysterious, complex and invisible soil building processes observable for biological growers? The Tilth Indicator looks at the three aspects of the soil aggregate, using the following measures (grouped together by the part of soil they monitor):

Physical: Aggregate Stability - Bulk Density - Texture - Penetrometer

Chemical: pH - Electrical Conductivity (EC) - Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)

Biological: Field Capacity - Total Carbon - Total Nitrogen - C/N ratio

Space does not allow detailed descriptions of each measure, how they monitor the soil aggregate and how they combine to give a picture of soil structure. Instead, we will discuss how this Tilth Indicator could be used to monitor the effects frequent tillage for weeds is having on soil structure. This will give a sense of how the tool can be used to examine the parts of a stable soil aggregate listed in the table.

Aggregate Stability is at the heart of good soil structure, but the lab test used to measure this is technical and requires lots of practice to get accurate readings. Here is a quick field test

Soil Aggregate part

Indicator measure

Soil Particle - Sand/Silt/Clay	Texture
Small Pore Space - holds Water, soil life maintained	Field Capacity
Large Pore Space - holds Air, allows good fungi to breathe	Bulk Density
Microbial Film - binds particles together	Aggregate Stability
Clay / Humus - holds available nutrients	CEC

growers can do at their kitchen table that will tell them the same thing, at no cost. Take a bowl and fill it with water, drop in a clump of soil from your reference soil plot and stir. If the soil clump does not break down, the water stays clear and bubbles come out of the clump then your soil has good wet aggregate stability and your soil has good soil structure.

This one simple test will give you guidance about whether frequent tillage operations, espe-

Soil Structure - continued on page 20...

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cially with a rototiller, are hurting your soil structure. If this test shows weak aggregate stability then you should examine your tillage operations and see how things could be done differently (for example, allelopathic cover crops as an alternative to tillage for weed control).

Some tests, like Bulk Density, require a lab. Rob's Tilth Indicator is a tool for interpretation of these tests, and comes with Rob as interpreter (or, if you are skilled at this, you can do it on your own). The Bulk Density number is the weight of Soil Particle + Pore Spaces in a given volume. The higher the Bulk Density number the lower the amount of Pore Space and the poorer the soil structure. Compact soils have high Bulk Density numbers. If this is a first test, then you get a baseline to use for monitoring changes. It can take one or more years to see changes in indicators and 5 years for soil life to recover from harsh industrial chemicals used to produce food.

Let us say you decide that more organic matter needs to be added to improve soil structure. The quick release nitrogens used by conventional growers are not available to you so slow release biological N must be used. You must plan to have enough soil N to feed the soil life, create long term organic matter and ensure nutrients are available when the crop needs it.

The next step is to see what the quality of the organic matter in the soil is like. In the Nitrogen deficient soils of the Okanagan, this is an important step in building up organic matter and ensuring enough nitrogen is present. The % Organic Matter used on all soil tests tells you only about Total Carbon, nothing about Nitrogen. Total Carbon and Total Nitrogen give us the C/N ratio of a soil. You can still get % Organic Matter by multiplying Total Carbon by the fixed biological constant 1.72. Well structured fertile soils might have a C/N ratio of 14 - 10:1 while a less fertile soil would be 15:1 or more.

The other measures can be used to give an idea about whether the critical Small & Large Pore spaces are being maintained or lost (Field Capacity & Bulk Density); if the soil life is being fed enough to grow actively (Aggregate Stability,

Field Capacity) and whether the soil has enough capacity to hold available nutrients for the plant (CEC). Compact layers in the soil can be discovered with the use of a homemade Penetrometer. Finally the salinity and dissolved minerals in the soil solution can be measured using EC, all intensively irrigated soils need to monitor this.

Unseen, complex biological processes are involved in building good soil tilth and Rob's Tilth Indicator is designed to help farmers connect the effects of their farming practices on stable soil aggregates. Helping to assess how well the soil life is being fed and supported is the key to managing good soil structure.

Call Robert Dixon at 712-9209 or email rnwdixon@silk.net if you would like to discuss soil structure issues or learn more about the tilth indicator.

1. Soil Health Assessment in Organic Farming Systems, Julia Wagner, 2005 <[certifiedorganic .bc.ca/COABC Programs/OSDP](http://certifiedorganic.bc.ca/COABC/Programs/OSDP)>





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Assessment Attacks Farmers

by Bill Ruzicka

The BC Assessment Authority is insisting that agricultural land must be "actively farmed"; otherwise, under their "split classification" it becomes residential and is subject to taxes at the residential rate.

This is becoming a serious problem for beekeepers. In our situation, for example, the land base for our 80 hives has been limited to the bee yard space, disregarding bees' need for forage and the need for a buffer zone. In 2004, instead of an 80 acres parcel of land that we were previously able to claim as agricultural, we are now awarded 1/4 of an acre as agricultural and the rest of the land was zoned residential.



In 2005, the Assessment Authority did the same thing to 78 year-old Bob Johnson's property. He had 74 acres of agricultural land in Agricultural Land Reserve and they assessed him at 3/4 of an acre for a bee yard housing up to 1000 hives and 1 acre for his greenhouse. Residential zoning means an \$8,000 tax bill for Mr. Johnson.

In 2006, several farmers and beekeepers in the Okanagan who besides bees had other crops, orchards, raspberries, irrigated hay meadows, were denied agricultural status to half or more of their properties which are used only to provide pasture for their bees.

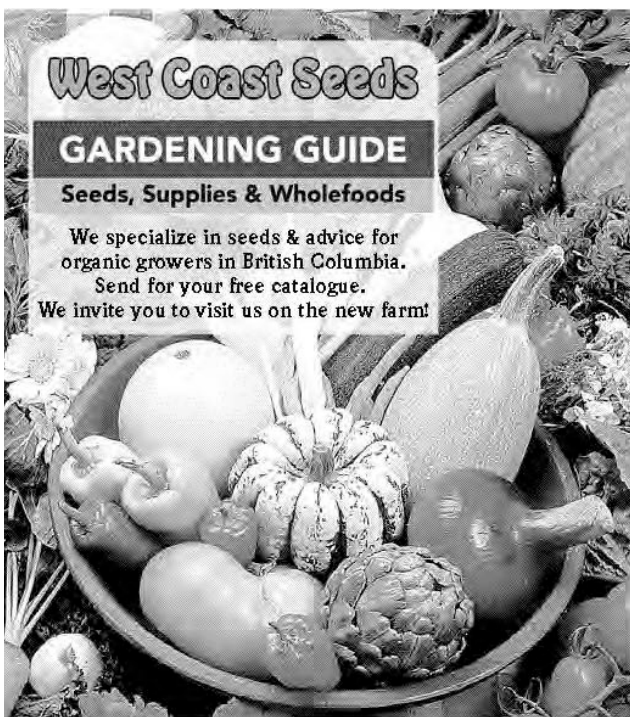
The Assessment Authority seems to think that, because bees can be fed and can fly anywhere, they don't require pasture. Furthermore, the Authority refuses to recognize pollination as an agricultural product, even though raising insects for biological control of pests is accepted; this means that when pollination is the major source of income for beekeepers, they are excluded from the farm classification.

All of this stems from a basic misunderstanding, not only of apiculture, but also of the principle of 'highest and best use'. It appears that the BC Assessment Authority thinks that the highest and best use for agricultural land is

housing. Certainly that is not what was intended when our land was placed in the Agricultural Land Reserve, but the fact that land is in the ALR is being ignored and the split classification means that many more farmers will wind up assessed for a residential tax rate. Not only beekeepers but many others will be forced out of business.

For more information on this issue, and how to take action, please visit our website www.mitegone.com and click on BC Assessment (at the bottom of the navigator). We must all pitch in and make it an agriculture issue to stop this process. Only a large public political outcry will stop it.

Bill Ruzicka is a commercial beekeeper in Kelowna, BC, operating 280 hives for pollination and bee stock production. Ph: 1-250 762-8156, email billruzicka@mitegone.com



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Farmer to Chef

by Rebecca Kneen

The big buzzword right now for farmers seems to be “marketing”. The short courses, the Ministry workshops, even our own annual conference, all seem to be talking about marketing. All too often, however, the focus seems to be on the general rather than the immediate and practical.

Most of us farm because we love spending time with the land and animals, rather than driving around town hobnobbing or attending huge marketing events. We love talking about what we do, but when you put us in front of a crowd or tell us to sell, it’s another matter. The “experts” say that we have to become slick salespeople in order to be better farmers, and it’s a contradiction many of us just can’t swallow. Then again, we don’t have to!

The first step is to find out who the chefs are in your area who understand their ingredients. Look first at the higher-end, locally owned and independent restaurants. Look at their menus and see if they are already aware of seasonality, local food or at least original ideas. Look also for restaurants that have a “fresh sheet” or whose menus change seasonally. All these are solid indicators of a potential market: the chef and restaurant are flexible, knowledgeable, and interested.

Chains, on the other hand, even small ones, are often locked into a contract with a large supplier, which demands that they purchase only through that supplier year-round. (The same holds for many of the small retail outlets

– ask them if they have such a contract, and if there is any possibility of adding local fresh product before going further with a sales approach.)

What really makes a chef decide to opt out of Sysco (the major supplier of everything)? Quality, delicious, local, healthful food, which is a good price in season. Food, which looks and tastes like food, really inspires cooks to cook. “I cook because I love to feed people, but moreover I love food itself – the way it looks, tastes and feels, both in the ground and when it comes out,” according to Heidi Noble, chef and sommelier. Capitalize on this: show the chef your food, give them a chance to explore how it could fit in their menu. Show them that food comes from a farm, not from the same truck that delivers toilet paper and soda pop.

Even with large chains, the philosophy of the chef is reflected in their menus and purchasing decisions. As Heidi says, “My entire business model was set up to be a showcase of what is happening locally in the Okanagan in terms of product and seasonality. This was motivated out of pride and the fact that there is so much bounty here and very few people locally in the food business taking advantage of that. Shame on them... The demand from visitors to this region is certainly there; but the people that live here deserve to eat locally and in season as well.”

The keys to successful relationships with chefs are consistent quality, a personal relationship and reliability. Consistency in this context doesn’t mean supplying produce out of season, it means knowing what you will have available when, how much of it you will have, and maintaining consistent quality. If you think the peas aren’t quite up to scratch, let your customers know, give them the opportunity to buy anyway, or hold off for better peas in two days. A bad impression (wilted greens, lack of shelf-life...) is impossible to erase. If you deal with strictly seasonal items, let the chefs know the duration of the season, and give them a chance to prepare some of their menus ahead of time. Many chefs have little knowledge of seasonality,

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so it is great to be able to give them a bit of a forecast of the year.

If you are supplying a core product, supply must be stable. This is where a distributor might be able to be of assistance, or working with other farmers with similar products to ensure you can fill orders week after week. If you're supplying a specialty product, you have the ability to roll with the seasons to some extent – but you must still be able to give customers a general sense of when a product will be available and for how long. In either case, you can always call customers with special items – that single case of white-fleshed peaches, or the earliest baby greens.

Reliability means being reachable, returning calls, and achieving your commitments. Call your customers every week – don't wait for them to call you – but when they do call you, return their call promptly. Let them know when you will be near a phone, and make it easy for them to order. Make your delivery details and ordering lead-times clear, and stick to them. You can make exceptions in your customers' favour, but not the other way around. When you meet a new potential customer, follow up! Remember, chefs are as busy as you are, so try to make it easy for them to order from you, rather than someone else. This also means being aware of their busy times – don't call during lunch and dinner rushes!

The personal relationship is the basic building block of marketing. You don't have to be slick, you do have to be genuine. Find a common ground with your customers – the guaranteed common ground is quality ingredients and a passionate commitment to food, but you may find other common interests which help cement the relationship. If your chefs know you, they will be understanding when trouble happens. "I want to know what my growers' practices are, what motivates them, what their challenges are – this helps us to work together and not have misunderstandings. My customers are also interested in my stories and connections of where I have sourced their ingredients from. If I know where my food came from and the moti-

ventions of the person who grew it, I can be proud and feel good about serving it," says Heidi.

Marketing meat is a very different kettle of fish. The basic barrier is that a vanishingly small number of chefs have training in cutting meat and creating menus with small numbers of particular cuts. Chefs are trained to buy a case of chicken breasts, steaks or legs of lamb – not to buy a side of beef or a whole lamb, and they literally don't know what to do with meat in such a form. Chefs have to serve 30 or more of any one dish in a night, and to be able to repeat that menu for at least a week, if not a month or two. A side of beef with only a dozen top sirloin steaks isn't much help to them.

On the other hand, a side of beef allows them more creativity for a considerably lower price – after all, they're getting sirloin for the price of ground round. An experienced and inventive butcher can cut a side to maximize the number of steaks of a certain size, for example, and can make them as thick as the chef desires. A whole lamb can be used for roasts, which go on forever, as well as satay, curries and stews (or fondue, for the trendy), or ground for specialty burgers or dolmades. The variety and quality of organic meat is a huge selling feature – as is the knowledge that the animal lived a good life and died cleanly: ethical meat is a strong food trend, and a big value to chefs. The closer you

Chef – continued on page 24...





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...Chef – continued from page 23

can bring a customer to the farm, the better, whether it's through photos of your animals and farm, or bringing them on a field trip, or just telling them stories about what's currently happening. Heritage breeds are of particular interest – a number of Vancouver chefs are actively seeking Berkshire or other heritage pigs, because they taste different and because they are a symbol of the diversity a good chef adores.

The challenge is to find a chef who has the training and the will to make the menu leap to whole carcasses. If you are a skilled meat-cutter yourself, you can also work around the issues, or work with your local butcher to solve problems for your chefs. Otherwise, you may have to find a special market for lots of ground beef! (This isn't necessarily a problem – there are plenty of gourmet burger joints in the province.) For small farmers, the issue may also be seasonality – the grass-finished beef you offered in the fall has become grain-fed by spring, which isn't quite what the chef originally tasted.

However, marketing your meat seasonally helps cope with this issue, and makes meat eaters as aware of seasonality as veggie eaters are. The other solution is to work cooperatively with other local meat producers to guarantee year-round supply and sufficient quantity.

An under-realized market for meat is specialty delis. There are many grocery stores and delicatessans which are set up to use odd quantities and whole carcasses. Bakeries who make meat pies are a great place to move large quantities of stewing meat and chicken. One Naramata deli purchases whole lamb and sides of beef, making take-out dinners and sandwiches, soups, stews and appetizers – marketing to them is like the freezer trade, only a lot bigger. They have a great deal of flexibility in quantity and seasonality. Also talk to your local deli about custom curing: you may be able to turn all that leftover ground meat into sausage, salami or other cured meats, opening a new and high-priced market.

Don't be afraid to ask questions of the chefs you meet. Find out what they love to cook, and

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try to figure out how your meat would fit into that dish or that menu. Mutual exploration of a problem builds an unbeatable personal relationship, making the chef that much more committed to you when you've worked out the bugs. Bring in seed catalogues or poultry catalogues. Discuss what makes one variety or breed distinctive, and whether the chef is interested in taking a chance. Allow the chef to suggest a particular crop or variety, if they are really interested – after all, you've got a guaranteed market!

Finally, work with other farmers if you have small quantities or difficulties in reaching markets. Cooperative marketing and distribution provides a service to your customers as well as yourself by smoothing out fluctuations in sup-

ply, creating one order desk, and providing larger quantities of hot items.

Most importantly, don't think you have to be a slick salesperson to sell your organic food! Chefs are as interested in great food as you are: approach them from this place of mutual passion, and all things become possible.

Slow Food Okanagan is dedicated to bringing chefs and farmers together, making it possible for us to make a living, care for the earth, and celebrate the bounty of the province. Our members include both chefs and farmers, eaters and growers. Convivium leader Heidi Noble and her partner run Joie, a winery and cooking school on Naramata Bench, while fellow convivium leader Rebecca Kneen and her partner run Left Fields and Crannóg Ales microbrewery in the Shuswap. ✓

Art for Seeds in Canada and Cuba

by Cathleen Kneen

The Canada-Cuba Seeds Project aims to encourage farmers in Canada and Cuba to engage in plant breeding to ensure an independent source of diverse seeds for the future. We hope to help Canadian farmers benefit from the innovative farmer-researcher collaboration developed in Cuba and to build a network of knowledge and expertise between the two countries, with particular emphasis on the Islands-to-Islands relationship between coastal BC and Cuba.

To raise money for this work we are raffling a painting by Cuban artist Paul Sosa. It is a delightful, whimsical water-colour which is also a profound political commentary. It's called "An Idea of My Country".

Paul Sosa's description of his painting is poetic rather than descriptive: "We are one giant being, multicultural in origin, a mishmash of



colour, race and enduring symbols; each day different, between joy and adversity. It would be sad if the true meaning of Cuba was defined by erroneous tourist promotions, far from the mirror in which we see ourselves every day. It is time to recognize that each day we increasingly shine with our own light, that we have more than one dream and more than one utopia, that we are destined to overcome the difficulties and the vastness of the darkness of these times. The extent we achieve in history and the future we build are dependant on us and the world; when confronted with

adversity you have to face it head-on, choose your path and follow it."

Tickets are \$10 from the COABC office or FarmFolk/CityFolk (604)730-0450. The draw will be on June 16 this year. ✓

Vegetables: If you grow them, you'll need to pack them – somewhere.

by Hermann Bruns

In visiting vegetable farms across BC, I've had an opportunity to tour packing facilities of all shapes and sizes. The most common observation is that the development of the packing shed has not kept pace with the growth of the farm. Farms moving tons of produce may still be using the same rudimentary packing facilities they set up in the first years of their operation.

Our own farm started out 14 years ago with quite a makeshift packing facility – a 4'x4' metal clad table (the kind grocery stores use to display produce on ice) and an old bathtub for washing, nearby trees for shade, and damp sheets to keep the produce fresh. But having grown up in the dairy industry where they invest lots of money in their buildings, I yearned to build a real packing shed. I may have gone overboard, but we now have a facility that is almost up to the standard of my brother's milking parlour – and will take almost as long to pay off too. But it can be so much fun to work in!

Before you grab the phone to call a building contractor, let me suggest a few design considerations.

1. Site selection: leave enough room around the building for the loads of produce coming from the field and leaving for market.
2. Building size: think ahead and build for tomorrow. You can never have too much space.
3. Layout: generally you would like see produce flow in a linear fashion, coming from the field through a door at one end of the building and rolling onto your delivery truck(s) from the cooler at the other end.
4. Services: good supply of wash water, sloping concrete floors to grated drain canals to remove wastewater, and adequate electricity service for washing and refrigeration equipment.
5. Lighting: windows are great for light and ventilation but don't forget lots of lights

focussed over packing areas for those dreary days or when working 'til midnight.

6. Storage for packing supplies: boxes, bags, and harvest totes use up a lot of space.
7. Bathroom: include sink and hot water for hand washing (especially important to prevent potential contamination of produce), a shower may be nice as well.
8. Office: makes keeping planting, harvest, and sales records as well as employee timesheets that much easier -- include phone, fax and computer connections.
9. Lunchroom: avoids employees tracking mud through your home to warm up food on those cold rainy fall harvest days.
10. Loading dock: locate near your cooler, makes moving stacks of market veggies by dolly or 1000 lb. pallets of cabbage onto your delivery truck a breeze.



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A few more points:

If you plan to do any produce packing in late fall or through winter, you'll want to make sure your building is well insulated. Insulation will even help keep you cooler during summer. Any walls likely to get wet from washing activities can be covered with "china-" or "puck-board" while painted plywood seems to work fine as an interior finish for the rest of the walls and ceiling.

Adding a few more feet to your ceiling height is relatively inexpensive, gives you more storage potential in the cooler and other adjoining storage rooms, and makes your packing space seem roomier. Outside and cooler doors should

be at least one foot wider than your pallets or harvest bins to facilitate easy produce movement.

Hire a professional concrete finisher to get the right slopes so that wash-water actually flows into the drains and you end up with a smooth durable finish. Large concrete aprons in front of all the major exterior doors will help reduce gravel and dirt being tracked into your packing shed. Pallet jacks in particular have this nasty habit of stopping cold when they get even a small pebble in front of a wheel.

So there you have it! You might have to forego buying that shiny new John Deere tractor or Chevy crewcab you've been eyeing but once you

have a good packing facility you'll be amazed how it will improve working conditions and save labour.

Hermann Bruns, operates Wild Flight Farm (Mara, BC) together with his wife, Louise, 2 pre-teen children and several dedicated employees growing and packing organic vegetables for customers from Revelstoke to Kelowna and points in between.



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Does Size Really Matter?

by Cara Nunn

The organic sector is suffering from growing pains. As the only sector of the multi-billion dollar food industry that is showing any significant growth, organics is being inundated with corporate players wanting to grab a piece of the pie. Household-name companies like Coca-Cola, Kraft and Heinz are behind organic brands such as Odwalla juices, Bearitos, and

Celestial Seasonings. Seeds of Change is owned by M&M Mars; Unilever (the 4th largest food company in the world) now owns Ben & Jerry's, Dean Foods, the largest milk marketer in the USA, owns Horizon Dairy – and the list goes on. Now Wal Mart has announced it will be focusing on organics as a way to increase its 15% share of the US food market (it's the largest seller of groceries in the country) and attract higher-income customers.

All of this has raised fears that the integrity of organics is up for grabs. In the USA, control of the sector has been negotiated into federal jurisdiction, where the capacity of huge corporate bodies to lobby behind closed doors is well known, and evident in attempts to water down the National Organic Program. There are concerns that a similar scenario might play in Canada with the new Canada Organic Standard.

The Organic Trade Association statistics show that organics is the only sector of the US Food Market experiencing sustained growth. From 1997 – 2005 the sector saw increases of 20% per year to a total of \$13 billion dollars in the US and \$3.1 billion in Canada. This compares to a total growth of the US food market of only 2-4%. Terry Ackerman of Organic Meadow, speaking at the COABC Spring Conference,



made a similar point when he stated that the Canadian organic food market is growing 15-20% per annum; organic dairy 20%-25%. Big business is simply going where the money is. The OTA itself now has members such as Dole, Kraft, and Grocery Manufacturers of America.

The entrance of corporate players provides some benefit to the organic sector by increasing availability of

organic products to consumers as well. These corporations provide an increase in R&D monies that would not normally be available in



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a marginal sector and the encouragement to add additional acreages to be converted to organic production. However, purchasing will be increasingly centralized to gain price advantage, thus eliminating the local producer in favour of large operations in California and Mexico (not to mention China) where products are available in large quantities at lower costs. The ability of the sector to be self-sustaining in the face of reduced income is questionable, and while larger producers may benefit, the benefit to local growers appears to be minimal.

Horizon Organic, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dean Foods, which holds 70% of the organic dairy market in the USA, has been accused of failing to meet the organic standard in relation to pasture. Headquartered in Dallas, TX, Dean Foods has 120 production plants in the U.S., U.K., Spain, and Portugal and produces 2 billion gallons of milk per year – second only to Nestlé worldwide in terms of its dairy sales with \$7+ billion in 2003; Dean now controls about 35% of all milk, 70% of organic milk, and 90% of soy milk in the U.S. Dean's shareholders include: Microsoft, General Electric, Philip Morris, Citigroup, Pfizer, Exxon/Mobil, Coca Cola, Wal-Mart, Pepsi-Co, and Home Depot. (www.familyfarmdefenders.org)

On Feb. 17, 2005 the Cornucopia Institute (www.cornucopia.org) filed two complaints with the US Department of Agriculture, alleging factory farm style conditions on Horizon's organic operations. The 4000-head Idaho farm in dispute is directly owned and managed by Dean/Horizon, while the 10,000 head farm in CA, split between organic and conventional, is owned by Case Vander Eyk, Jr. Cornucopia filed a third complaint on Jan. 10th against Colorado-based Aurora Dairy with its 5700 cows, another organic supplier to Dean/Horizon. Organic principles of long-term sustainability and animal welfare are also being violated on these largescale organic operations when up to 40% of the cows are culled annually. As Michael Pollan wrote in the New York Times Sunday Magazine (5/13/01), "On Horizon's dairy farms in the west, thousands of cows that never encounter a blade of grass spend their days confined to a fenced dry lot, eating (certified organic) grain and tethered to milking machines three times a day."

The growth of what has been called "Organics, Inc." is not limited to takeovers by non-organic entities. There is widespread perception that organic enterprises, in order to succeed in the marketplace, have adopted the aggressive tactics of their competitors. (see letter to the editor, p. 30) Faced with the prospect of a 20-30% growth rate, they are opting for takeovers and franchising, rather than (for example) developing collaboration among smaller, locally-focused enterprises to satisfy and build the market.

Certainly there is, and we hope will continue to be, growth in the organic sector. But on what terms remains to be seen.

Sources: Corporate Social Responsibility Press Release, 30/02/2006;

Organic, Inc., Jason Mark June 9, 2005

Reuters: Organic foods slip into mainstream, Mar 9, 2006

The Morning News: Wal Mart pushing Organics, Anita French, 2006/03/09

Phil Howard, Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, Corporate-ownership



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Letters to the editor are welcome. Letters must be under 500 words. We reserve the right to edit for length.

Corporate Bullying of a Family Farm

At the recent COABC AGM in Abbotsford, Terry Ackerman, the marketing manager of "Organic Meadow" from Ontario, held a lunch time speech. Although I did miss the lunch time conversation, Terry delivered his speech so well that I could not help listening. When he was done with his talk, I was done with my food. The food was probably good, yet I was left with a bitter taste in my mouth.

I was sharing the table with young farmers, old farmers, and other people who are interested in the production of good food. I know that the farmers at my table have to own or rent land, livestock, machinery and fences to provide for their families. In contrast, Terry proudly told us that "Organic Meadow" owns laptop computers only. And I'm sure "Organic Meadow" is vastly more profitable than organic farming.

After lunch I learned that "Organic Meadow" supplied the dairy products that we ate at the meeting. To me that felt a bit like eating Alberta beef at a BC Cattleman's Dinner, except that the little milk cartons traveled three times as far.

On our long way home my wife and I reminisced about friendships made, the night we danced away and the food we ate. We briefly wondered

why there were none of the great products from Jerseyland Organics, or the wonderful sheep cheeses from Mountain Meadow, both BC family farms.

Arriving back in the Chilcotin we had an email waiting for us suggesting that Hani and Theres Gasser of Mountain Meadow were being threatened with court action, should they prove unwilling to change the name of their company. The threatening started last fall by a law firm from Ontario, representing no other than "Organic Meadow", Terry Ackerman's company.

Since then the Gassers have spent \$3800 to defend the right to use the name Mountain Meadow, which they have been using for the last 12 years. Setting aside ethical issues and emotion, I will show by means of economics only, what this means for them. On a family farm, these \$3800 have to come out of profit (corporations keep law firms on a retainer). If we give Mountain Meadow a profit of 5% (few Canadian farms can boast that sort of margin), they will have to have sold \$76,000 worth of product just to be able to defend their rights.

That is a lot of lot of yoghourt and cheese.

So, when you buy organic dairy products, remember what the two different "Meadows" stand for: One stands for organic food produced and crafted in the mountain meadows of BC by a COABC member in good standing. The other stands for making profit with laptop computers.

Felix Schellenberg

The Joy of Dandelions

by Brenda Frick

Nature celebrates the start of the growing season with a sprinkling of cheery yellow flowers, reflecting the richer warmth of the spring sun. Dandelions are usually the first flower of spring, which makes them especially important for bees and other pollinators as they emerge flower-starved from a long winter. However, dandelions seem to polarize public opinion, especially when they occur in that most symbolic of environments, the urban lawn. CropLife, the trade association for pesticide manufacturers and plant biotechnology, claims that over one million packages of pesticide for

domestic turf are purchased annually by private homeowners in Canada (generally packaged in combination with fertilizers). According to a report by Alberta Agriculture, people in cities use an average of 4 times as much active herbicide ingredient per acre of home lawn compared to what farmers use per acre of farmland. The vast majority of this is "turf herbicides", the most common being 2,4-D.

Although CropLife and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada maintain that 2,4-D can be used safely, the Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) conducted

an extensive review of pesticide research and found consistent evidence of health risks to patients with exposure to pesticides, including 2,4-D. OCFP recommends that patients avoid exposure to all pesticides whenever and wherever possible. This includes exposures that occur from the use of pesticides in homes, gardens and public green spaces. An increasing number of health professionals are suggesting that a moratorium should be placed on cosmetic herbicide use, especially in urban environments; the province of Quebec and more than 60 cities across Canada have banned cosmetic herbicide use.



While some people are trying to poison dandelions, and some are seeking less toxic methods of eradication, dandelion is a cultivated crop in France, Belgium, Germany and China.

Herbal use of dandelions has a long history, including citations in herbals of China in the 7th century, Arabia in the 10th and Europe in the 15th. Today a variety of dandelion products can be obtained in health food stores, farmers' markets and on-line. The uses proclaimed for dandelion are varied, and include use as a diuretic, for digestion, as a cleanser for blood and liver, and for joint pain.

Dandelion is also a highly nutritious food plant. Leaves are high in minerals such as potassium, calcium, copper and iron, and in Vitamins A (more beta carotene than carrots), B complex, C and D. Leaves can be used as salad greens, as a cooked vegetable, as a tea, or as an ingredient in more varied recipes such as soups or casseroles. Leaves can even be salted and fermented like sauerkraut or used in combination with other herbs to brew as beer.

Those who have tasted a dandelion leaf in mid-summer and been discouraged by the taste can try it again this spring, before the plant begins to flower. Or tear off the old leaves and eat the new leaves as they regrow. Like lettuce, the young leaves have a much milder flavour. In France, the roots are harvested in fall, and brought indoors to be forced into shoot produc-

tion. Shoots grown in the dark are especially mild.

Dandelion roots are high in pectin and inulin, which foster the growth of friendly bacteria in the gut. Roots can be cleaned, chopped and boiled as a vegetable, or thinly sliced and stir-fried. Their high inulin content gives them a sweetness that develops as they are cooked. The roots may also be dried and ground for use as a caffeine-free coffee-like beverage.

Dandelion flowers can be made into juice, wine, or jelly. Flowers can be battered and fried, or made into pancakes or fritters. Dandelions are also used in products such as hair rinses or cosmetic creams.

Apparently people's attitudes toward dandelions are beginning to soften. A greater appreciation of dandelions is bound to lead to an improvement of our health and our environment. Perhaps it can even lead to an improvement in our finances as we learn to market rather than exterminate these gifts of nature.

Brenda Frick, Ph.D., P.Ag., is the Prairie Coordinator for the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada at the College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan; contact [RTF bookmark start:]_Hlt52765781



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