

British Columbia Organic Grower



Nurturing Wisdom: Mentorship

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Tulaberry Farm

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Ancient Practices in Modern Times

Twin Island Cider has embraced the ancient Georgian practice of fermenting in hand-crafted qvevri. Check out Katie Selbee's photo essay on page 16.

BC Organic Grower

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On the Cover: Gorgeous greens on display at market. Credit: Fierce Love Farm.

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Editor's Note

By Darcy Smith

As the green things start to grow, these pages continue to explore the theme of wisdom. Spring 2021 is all about nurturing wisdom through mentorship. In putting this issue together, I was struck by all the ways mentorship manifests, through academic institutions, family relationships, neighbours and friends, apprenticeships and farm jobs, and so much more. We have so much to learn from each other.



I was particularly moved by the mentorship described in our Organic Stories feature. Hailey Troock takes us to the Kootenays and a land match made in heaven between Tula-berry Farm and the new farmers who have joined Judi and Alex on the land, and where mentorship is flowing in both directions (page 8).

On page 9, Emma Holmes returns in our Ask an Expert column to share the power of on-farm research through the Sustainable Agriculture Landscapes nutrient management project, where farmers and researchers are learning together in ways that work with a farmer's needs and deliver regionally suitable results.

We also see how the past reaches into the present to deepen our learning and practices. On page 6, Anna Helmer delivers another stellar entry into her Biodynamic Farm Story series with an epiphany about what Steiner's lectures. And ancient techniques enhance modern cider-making at Twin Island Cider, where cider-maker Katie Selbee has been busy building qvevi. What on earth is qvevi, you ask? Flip to page 16 to find out!

Erin Bett of Fierce Love Farm is on the verge of graduating from Haliburton Community Organic Farm's incubator program, which served as inspiration for Island Organic Producer's Association's new incubator policy. On page 24, she shares what this incubation has meant for their farm.

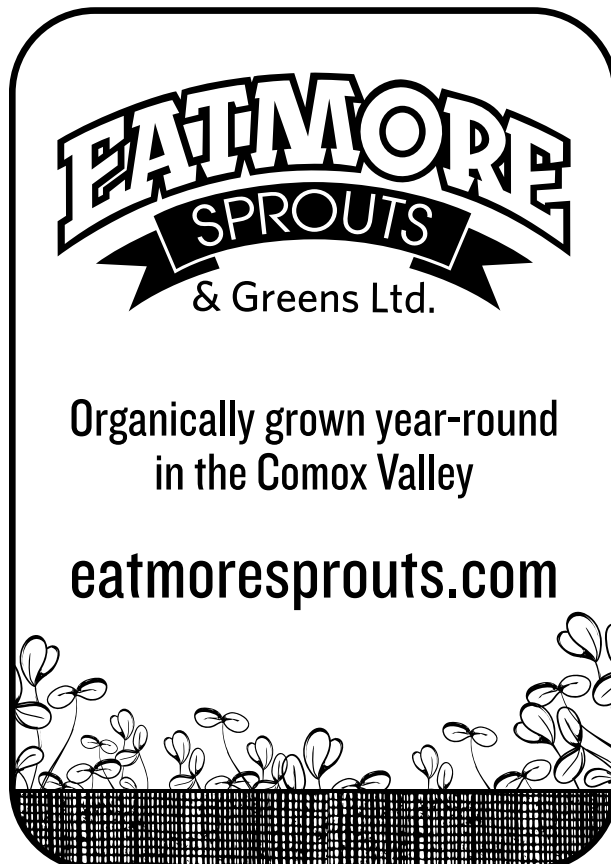
On page 20, Robin Mercy shares his experience using iCertify to renew certification for his seasonal mushroom farm,

and on page 23, Travis Forstbauer dives into the regenerative and organic conversation by highlighting the essential role certification plays in establishing best practices.

We have so much to learn. And the best place to learn it, is from each other. I deeply missed getting to break bread and see everyone in person at this year's BC Organic conference—every year, this event feeds my soul and my excitement for the work that I do to support this amazing organic community. And yet, the format of this year's conference left me feeling inspired and nourished in a different way. The podcast series brought all the wisdom of the organic community into my home, and I think with this format, the web of connections was larger than ever! Check out the conference recap on page 28, complete with photo contest winners and musings from Jordan Marr. 🌱

If you have a story to tell about organic food and farming, please get in touch. Reach out with your thoughts, letters, and story ideas to editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca—and be sure to visit us online at:

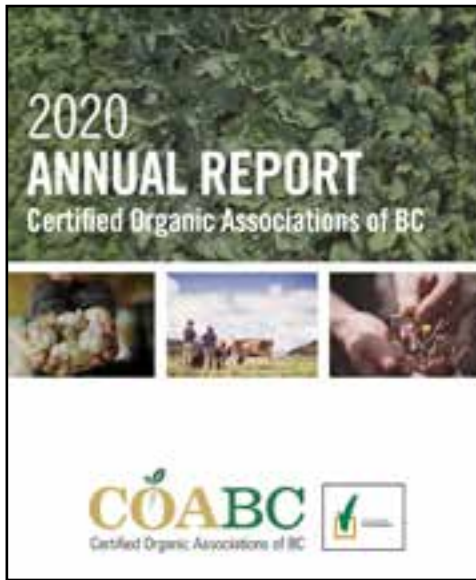
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An Update from COABC's Executive Director

By Eva-Lena Lang

We had a successful AGM a few weeks ago. It was our first virtual AGM and my first AGM as executive director. I've been in this position for a year now—it has been an engaging, busy year, with a steep learning curve.

I want to direct you to the annual report and thank Stacey Santos, our communications manager, for pulling it together, as well as all of the contributors. The report provides a good summary of the work the organization has done in the past year; I will highlight a few sections, and suggest reading the full report.

First, as many of you know and some of you may not, the organization is made up of a large group of dedicated volunteers: the COABC board of directors, the accreditation board, various committees, and of course staff in the office and contractors across the province. I want to thank everyone for all of their support this year. I worked very closely with

the executive Heather Stretch, Niklaus Forstbauer, David Janssens, and Tristan Banwell, and I appreciate their guidance. I especially want to highlight Tristan, who is stepping off of the board and executive this year. He contributed his time to four committees this past year.

Paddy Doherty and Corey Brown have been with the organization for many years and will be stepping off the board this year as well. Paddy recently interviewed AB retiring board member, Anne Macey, and

it's a great listen—along with the many other wonderful podcasts produced by COABC's conference coordinator and board member Jordan Marr. These words are not enough, and it especially feels funny coming from me, so new to the organization, but thank you to Anne, Paddy, and Corey, for all of their contribution to the organic sector.

The annual report is categorized by COABC's four strategic plan goals:

1. Administer the organic accreditation program in BC and support the certification bodies and the certification system in an effective manner;
2. Engage with consumers, government, and organizations to increase the demand for organic, its availability and its profile;
3. Facilitate and provide opportunities for support and education to members of the organic sector; and
4. Maintain a strong, sustainable, representative organization.

Maureen Loft, COABC's accreditation board director, summarized the work COABC has done as a Conformity Verification Body, administering the BC Certified Organic Program and accrediting three of COABC's nine certification bodies operating under the rules of the Canada Organic Regime.

Stacey highlights the communication pieces produced by COABC. These include the E-news, website, social media, and, of course, this magazine. COABC also continues to have its own co-operative ad page in Edible Vancouver Magazine, an agreement organized by Mary Forstbauer many years ago. COABC members are invited to advertise on this page at a reduced rate.

Next is the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) report, submitted by Niklaus Forstbauer. Niklaus is not only on the executive, but he is also on COABC's human resources committee and is COABC's BCAC representative. COABC is a member of BCAC, and we contribute annual membership fees to their work advocating for agriculture in BC. This seat is important as Niklaus brings the voice of organics to the table. He has been working hard at developing a strong relationship for increased collaboration and education.

Another very important membership is the Organic Federation of Canada (OFC). COABC contributes membership fees to the important work the OFC does. BC's rep, Rebecca Kneen, submitted another informative activity update for COABC's annual report. The OFC's two main areas of activity include standards maintenance and the Organic Science Cluster, and Rebecca summarizes this work in her report well. She also mentions OFC is always eager for people to participate in the stan-

dards maintenance process. Connect with her if you're interested in getting involved.

COABC has a strong relationship with the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (AFF). We work closely with their organic specialist, Karina Sakalakaus, and appreciate the support received from the ministry this past year. As of early March, Emma Holmes is back from maternity leave and I look forward to working with her.

We had two meetings with Minister Popham and her team last year and the outcomes of our spring 2020 organic roundtable led to some of the projects we're currently working on. AFF has contributed to many projects over the past few years, including iCertify and the core review.

iCertify has recently completed a full year of successful operation. Crystal Arsenault, our technical coordinator, highlights achievements made in the past year and summarizes the current status of this project. She has also been supporting UBC with the development of a farm management app called Litefarm, which links to iCertify.

For more information about the other work the organization has completed this past year or is in the process of doing, please refer to the annual report.

Award-Winning Leadership in Ag

Congratulations to Carmen Wakeling! Carmen won the BC Agriculture Council's top award, the Award for Excellence in Agriculture Leadership, this year at the annual Ag Gala. The award is designed to honour leaders in the agriculture industry who have

exemplified personal values, performance, and achievement in BC's farm community.

COABC President Heather Stretch was proud to nominate Carmen for this much-deserved award:

"Having known Carmen peripherally for many years, our relationship has deepened since 2018 when she encouraged me to join the COABC Board of Directors and subsequently mentored me into the role of president. I was fortunate to have a front row seat to witness her collaborative, respectful, inclusive leadership style. Carmen does not shy away from difficult work. She has a gift to see to the heart of contentious matters and cooperates to develop solutions. She creates unity from discord by listening carefully to all parties and finding common ground.

"As the owner of EatMore Sprouts in Comox, BC, Carmen employs 45 people and sells year-round throughout the province. While environmental sustainability is at the heart of what Eatmore Sprouts does, Carmen also embraces cutting edge technology. Because she recognizes that food safety is crucial in her business Carmen has collaborated with scientists, regulators, and certifiers in many capacities to ensure that EatMore Sprouts not only adheres to best practices but also leads in the establishment of those best practices.

"Carmen has been involved in developing the local business community in the Comox Valley while finding time to serve many provincial organizations such as the Small-Scale Food Processors Association, Pacific Agricultural Certification Society (PACS), and the Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC). At the fed-

eral level she represents COABC on the Agriculture and Agri-food Canada Sustainability Roundtable. Internationally she is president of the International Sprout Growers Association.

"Whatever her role, Carmen Wakeling supports and encourages other farmers as she shares her vast knowledge, always looking for ways to foster leadership skills in those around her."

Thank you, Carmen, from everyone at COABC for all that you do for agriculture in BC and beyond!

Funding Supports Organic Conversion

Do you know a farmer transitioning to organic who could use a leg up during COVID? The Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) is accepting further applications for their Organic Conversion Support Program to assist organic producers financially for their added costs incurred while transitioning to organic farming.

This program reimburses producers for their paid certification costs up to \$1000 maximum. The fund has been a huge success in supporting and growing organic in Canada through an incredibly difficult year for farmers.

The program is for farmers in their first, second or third year of pre-certification or for farmers already certified organic and are increasing their organic acreage.

COTA is accepting applications until all funds are allocated, or by June 30, 2021. Learn more and apply here:

canada-organic.ca/en/what-we-do/market-access/organic-conversion-support-program





biodynamic farm story: What Steiner Said

Cows happily munching on spuds. Credit: Helmers Organic Farm.

By Anna Helmer

I exhibit a strong spring Biodynamic practice. I have all the time in the world for stirring BD 500, tending to compost piles, and dutifully attempting to follow the planting calendar. In the summer things will likely slide, and the fall is very Biodynamically weak for me. Winter comes and at that point it's out of my hands as that's when the influence of the distant planets of the cosmos takes effect in the soil. For real.

But that is neither here nor there, for the purposes of spring. Don't get hung up on that. What's important now is that this spring I have already vacuumed the farm truck and washed it twice. I am well on my way to cleaning up the shop and tidying the upstairs of the barn. And I have not lost my interest in learning more about Biodynamic farming.

A couple of earnest, active, and idealistic springs have passed since I decided to develop a more learned and deliberate approach to Biodynamic farming. Prior to that, I had been a willing, but not a very wondering, participant in our farm's practice. I would have happily kept going like that, but my inability to articulate even the basic concepts was undeniably denting my preferred image as a modern, hip organic potato farmer.

Anna, what is Biodynamic farming? Anna of yester-spring: uh, well, you know how the moon and planets and stuff are there...and the soil is important...you have to look after

the soil...and make good soil in compost. It's sort of homeopathy for the soil. Beyond organics.

You see the problem.

Biodynamically-woke Anna: agriculture involves taking crops off the land and is therefore inherently exploitive. A Biodynamic grower knows this and works to replenish and strengthen the life and energy of the soil so that the crops continue to be imbued with taste and vitality.

Oh well, then. That explains that.

I did not make this up, of course. It is in the lectures, buried deep in Lecture 5. Finally, after countless readings, I have picked up on what Steiner was putting down. If you ask me, he should have led with this idea, rather than launching Lecture 1 with a description of the relative effects of cosmic energy on plants, animals, and humans.

The thing is, though, he didn't. He died only a year after delivering these lectures and he may have known he was mortally ill at the conference. There may in fact have been a sense of urgency to his delivery. So, he probably started exactly where he meant to start and finding a powerful mission statement in Lecture 5 does not absolve me from figuring out what he is talking about leading up to that point. For now, however, I am agog with dawning comprehension.

Now. You will point out to me that regenerative farming is all about replacing in the soil what has been used, and

what's so special about Steiner saying it? Well, I guess that would be the compost preparations he describes. They are special.

Steiner is not insisting that farmers stop regenerating soil in whatever way they are doing it, from cover cropping to (just short of) using synthetic chemical fertilizers, and the massive number of options in between. He is, however, suggesting that these are not adequate measures. They are driven by science, which is not enough.

The biodynamic method is driven by observation, experience, and a belief in the existence of forces that cannot be immediately seen or measured, but whose presence is proven in the resulting product. It is these cosmic influences, collected in the soil and taken up into the plant, that are removed along with the crop and therefore must be replaced. He is not denying the efficacies and even necessities of science in agriculture but rather saying that it stops short of completing the regeneration necessary to maintain the production of healthy, tasty food.

Steiner's Lecture 5 describes the Biodynamic Compost Preparations, which when applied in very small doses, enliven and provide stimulus for the soil to again be able to collect the streams of cosmic force. They consist of common and recognizable plants variously treated and applied to compost heaps, the soil of which is then applied to the field or garden. There was no scientific underpinning then,

or even now; he expected that the science would catch up eventually.

Look, it is a scientific fact that the moon causes the tides of the ocean and that the sun warms our atmosphere. These influences are easily perceived of course, and science is there to confirm the obvious and fill in the details. Can we propose that other planets and cosmic bodies take effect on earth too, although not in a way we can easily see, feel, touch, or smell? Can we do this ahead of science telling us it is so?

Heavens above, it has taken me a long time to write this article. I had to go back into the lectures quite a bit to see if I was on the right track. I even read a bit of Steiner poetry. I wrote long, meandering paragraphs about the contrasting yet inseparable dualities of matter and spirit, of science and spirituality. I did a lot of deleting.

I'll have to leave it here. I must go outside and get giddy over spring. 🌱

Anna Helmer farms with her family in Pemberton and would like to scientifically prove that the hundred-pound sacks of seed potatoes are getting heavier all the time.

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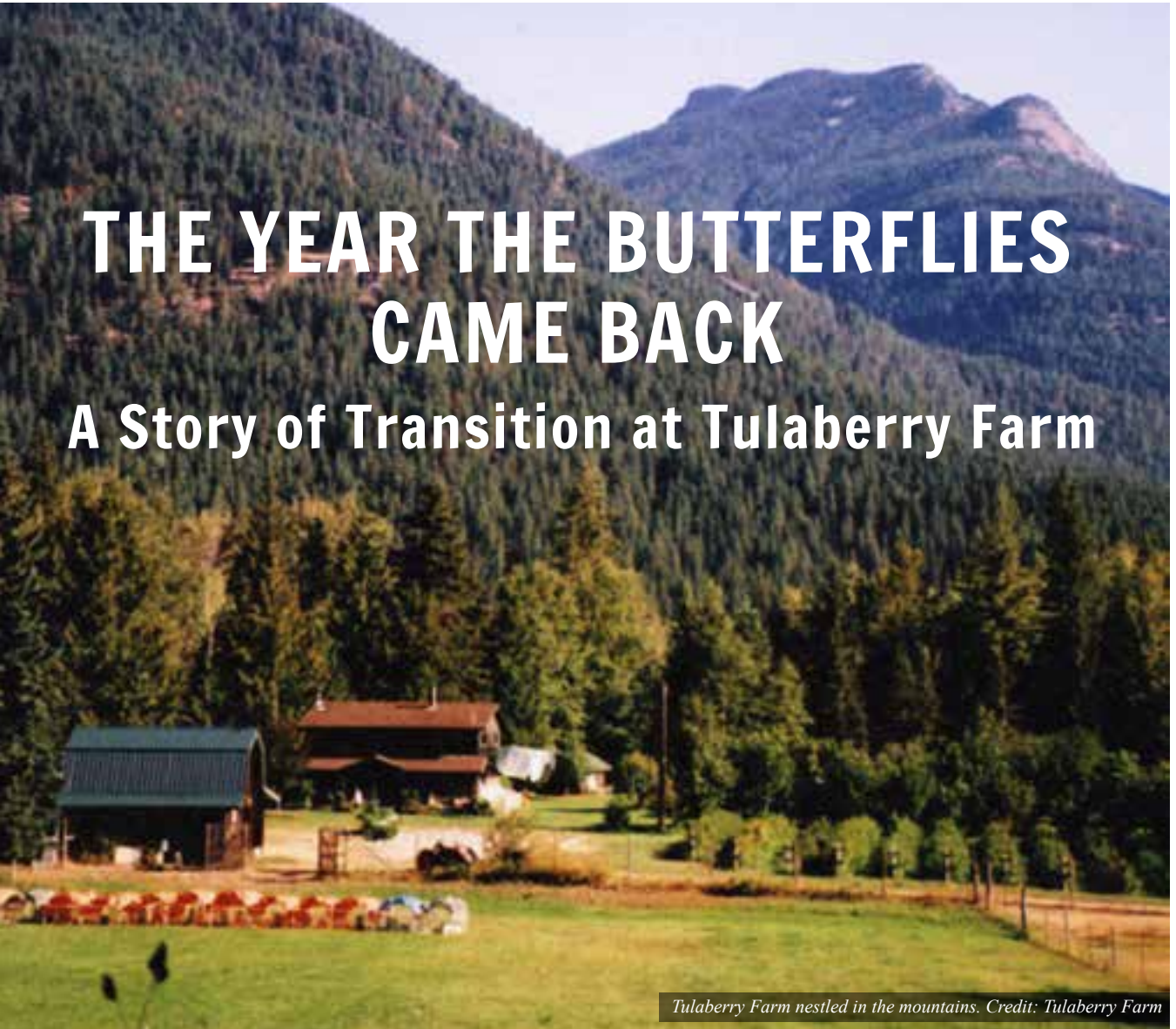
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THE YEAR THE BUTTERFLIES CAME BACK

A Story of Transition at Tulaberry Farm



Tulaberry Farm nestled in the mountains. Credit: Tulaberry Farm

By Hailey Troock

I picked up the phone one cold winter day in 2019 to a request from the owners and operators of Tulaberry Farm in the picturesque riverside community of Passmore, BC. Judi Morton and Alex Berland wanted to find some young and enterprising farmers to continue the legacy of their certified organic farm. After decades of farming in the Slocan Valley, where they raised their family and had become integral members of the local community, they had a beautiful space and knowledge to share.

A little more than a year later, Emily Woody and Nathan Wiebe, two farmers operating Confluence Farms out of Kelowna, BC, were searching for land. They had a dream to relocate their market garden and bakery start-up to the Kootenays, somewhere near Nelson, where they could

establish roots for the long-term. In one season they had grown out of the backyard space they had started their farm on, selling through CSA shares and delivery.

All I had to do was introduce the two couples through the BC Land Matching Program (BCLMP), and the rest seemed to fall effortlessly into place—truly a confluence.

As Tulaberry and Confluence start down the path of transition together, it's worth considering what farm transition is all about.

For me, it's a million things. Last fall, our team at Young Agrarians released the BC Transition Toolkit for Non-Family Farm Transfer, and the process of researching and creating this resource provided us all with an in-depth understanding of a pretty complex topic: how do we transfer



Nathan Wiebe and Emily Woody. Credit: Confluence Farm.



Nathan, Emily, Judi, and Alex. Credit: Tulaberry Farm.

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The market garden at Tulaberry Farm. Credit: Tulaberry Farm

farms from one generation to the next, outside of the family? Something that stuck with me is how the mentorship available within the process of transition can be a fundamental part of the success of the incoming farm business.

New farmers face myriad challenges in today's agricultural, economic, and climatic landscapes. It can take years to build up clientele, pay off start-up costs, establish secure sales channels for your products, learn the land and soil, mitigate increasing climatic variability, and more. Transitioning into an established farm can ease this learning journey, as the outgoing farmer passes along this critical information to their successors.

Judi came to be the steward of Tulaberry Farm when she purchased the land in 1968. She lived there for a few years before leaving, then coming back for a second stint. This is when Alex came into the picture in 1974. After 12 years together on the land they left to pursue other careers in Vancouver, where they stayed for two decades. Eighteen years ago, they relocated back to Tulaberry for good. Judi went from being an intensive care nurse at the children's hospital to diving full-time into farming. She says the transition felt natural; though "people think they are unrelated, both are nurturing roles."

Judi's most prominent memory from her early years on the farm centre around her second season stewarding the land full-time. She refers to this as "the year the butterflies came back." The planting of perennials, shrubs, and fruit bushes—food for the beautiful pollinators—breathed new life onto the land. Judi and Alex's farming philosophy speaks to this. She says we "sought to leave the land better than we found it" and that they, like all of us, are stewards of the land we inhabit. They don't feel they own the land:

"though we bought it, we get the privilege to steward it," she says.

Judi's experience living in their community has evolved since those early years. "When we were first at Tulaberry before we left for 20 years, we were deeply embedded in our community. When we came back, we picked up much of the same community but also many new friends who had moved there." Though many of the "old guard from 70s and 80s remain good friends," she says, referring to her original cohort, "much of my social circle has centered around farming over the years." Judi is also excited about the young families she has seen moving into the area over the past decade.

The Kootenay Organic Growers Society has played a big part in her farming community specifically. "Farming is a very lonely business," she says, "and you are working alone a lot. Going to market was my social life; I was always so excited to see other farmers. When it was slow, we would congregate to the centre to share information and talk."

When Judi is 90, she says, "I want friends who are 60 and 70." Her strong attachment to the land she stewards and her desire to want to die there are part of the reason they pursued a land match. They had been looking for people to transition into Tulaberry to for more than a decade; aging in place remains important to them but it is "hard to watch fencing fall down on the land when you no longer have the energy to deal with it."

For Judi and Alex, the BCLMP plays an important role, as "many young farmers need a leg up to get going, and retiring farmers want to age in place." Working with hands-on

support made them think about things that hadn't come to mind and how to word things. She reflects on it as a great process, getting through negotiations to the point where "everyone was happy."

Emily and Nathan came into farming at different times in their lives. Nathan was inspired by Emily. After growing up in a big city, he "was feeling burnt out and unhappy and wanted to be closer to nature and work that really mattered to me. The idea of growing food for a living had never crossed his mind until he met her," he says, meaning Emily (on a dance floor, six years ago, no doubt!). He reflects on how Emily "showed me what was possible through farming and together we made our dreams of starting a farm a reality."

Emily came to farming for a combination of reasons. "I wanted to do good in the world, felt a strong calling to do something about climate change and the state of the environment, and really liked good food." She says she "had grown up with a big garden on an acreage and was always involved in growing food throughout my formative years. When I went to college, I began to explore my passion for food and farming more deeply. The work was so nourishing to me, I knew I wanted to be a farmer."

While Nathan's formal education is in business, marketing, and holistic nutrition and Emily studied ecological agriculture and community development, some of the soft and hard skills that have helped them in their farming career have surprised them. Nathan notes that "taking the time to really understand marketing, branding, and website design has helped immensely," and recommended reading *How to Build a Story Brand* by Donald Miller and anything by Seth Godin.

"Baking skills have really come in handy, surprisingly! I've always had a passion for sweets and spent a year working for a small bakery in Edmonton," says Emily. "I've spent a lot of time developing recipes that utilize what we are growing on the farm. Our value-added products have really helped to set us apart and bring a more diversified income stream to the farm."

Before meeting Emily and Nathan, Judi compared finding compatibility between Tulaberry's goals and those of new farmers to "waiting for a unicorn." Over the years, they had lots of great young people out there working with them. She says she "saw a lot of people get into it and then realize how much work it is." That's why for her, finding farmers with a couple of years under their belt was important, so that she felt confident this was something they wanted as a long-term lifestyle.

Compared to the idea she had of who she was looking for to transition the farm to, Judi says Emily and Nathan are, in short, "they are everything we ever wanted." In more detail, she listed out the qualities that have been the most important for them and that Emily and Nathan embody in spades:

- Good communication skills: "If you can't talk together, it's not going to work. If people harbour feelings and don't communicate what's bugging them or what they're happy about, how do you make a relationship work?"
- Experience in farming: They "didn't want to start from scratch," and Emily had four years of farming under her belt.
- Off-farm income: "It's hard to make a living on farming here; farms are small. I wasn't convinced it can't be done but it can present a huge hurdle if you don't have something on the side. Nathan has his Level Up business to help support the farm in start-up."
- Being a generous spirit: "When I make dessert, I bring over some for them and they do the same. Their generosity of spirit matches ours."
- Reliability: "If someone says they will feed the chickens, we need to be able to walk away and know they will do it. Emily and Nathan have done everything they say they are going to do and more."
- Enthusiastic and energetic: Self-explanatory!

Judi says that having new farmers on their land has changed the way they experience it. "Like having a kid, you see the world fresh through their eyes. As snow melts and things come up, they are seeing it with fresh eyes and enthusiasm and I feel like my own has increased because of being able to see the farm through their eyes."

For their first season on the farm, Emily and Nathan are planning on offering 20 different value-added products throughout the season and are particularly excited about having Judi and Alex as their mentors. "Mentorship means having someone to go to for support and guidance who is dedicated to helping us succeed," Emily says. Having mentors has "really helped boost our confidence and given our farming operation a huge advantage over where we were last year. Judi and Alex have been farming in the Kootenays for so long and have such a great reputation in the community. Just by being associated with Tulaberry Farms we have noticed that people are a lot more receptive to us and are excited to see our new partnership."

As a mentor, Judi sees her role this season "to work with them when they want me to work with them. It's important that they don't feel that they are being micromanaged or I'm looking over their shoulders." She is confident that they know what they're doing but not necessarily on this land, and that is where she sees her role in mentorship—though she also knows that on transplanting days, "having three sets of hands can make a big difference!"

Judi is inspired by the idea that "mentorship is something that flows both ways"—Emily has shown Judi how to make sourdough bread and frosting out of maple syrup and butternut squash—and in turn, Emily and Nathan are inspired by Judi and Alex's "life story and dedication to their land."

Continued on page 30...



BC Farmers & Ranchers LEARNING TOGETHER



Carmen Wong weighing amendments (compost and organic fertilizer) to apply to research plots on an organic vegetable farm in the lower Fraser Valley for the UBC nutrient management regional field trial study. Credit: Amy Norgaard.

By Emma Holmes

The Sustainable Agricultural Landscapes (SAL) Lab at UBC’s Faculty of Land and Food Systems is taking a collaborative approach to research that supports producers in making management decisions that are science-based and regionally grounded.

I recently had the opportunity to catch up with Sean Smukler, DeLisa Lewis, Amy Norgaard, and Raelani Kesler from the SAL Lab to get an update on their Organic Vege-

table Nutrient Management and Climate Resilient Vegetable Farming research projects.

Something that stood out to me, and that I feel is especially pertinent to this issue, is the mentorship and collaborative, on-farm approach the SAL Lab is taking. The research design includes two demonstration “mother sites” at UBC Farm in Vancouver and Green Fire Farm on Vancouver Island, as well as 20 “sister sites” on working organic farms in the Fraser Valley, Pemberton Valley, Vancouver Island, and the Kootenays.



Collecting soil samples with a soil auger; hundreds of soil samples were collected for the regional field trials. Credit: Amy Norgaard.

The mother sites are controlled and replicated—they allow for the collection of scientifically rigorous data so that the researchers can tease out trends and gain a deeper understanding of how different elements in the system are interacting and impacting each other.

While a rigorous approach is important, it is very difficult to implement one on working farms because farmers are already trying to manage so much complexity in terms of crop rotation, timing, etc. Adding a full-blown research project with rigorous controls can take away from the primary goal of running a profitable business.

The sister sites are simpler experiments, without controls and replicates, that are done on multiple working farms in different regions of the province. They provide insights into regional and site variability, and allow us to see whether trends from the mother sites are true across different regions in BC. The regional sister sites also create the opportunity for farmers to participate in the research by pointing SAL researchers to key practical challenges and unanswered questions.



Carmen Wong collects soil samples from research plots on an organic vegetable farm in Pemberton, BC for the UBC nutrient management regional field trial study. Credit: Amy Norgaard.



Amy Norgaard in the field. Credit: Kira Border.

Organic Vegetable Nutrient Management

The SAL Lab recently shared the results from their two-year Organic Vegetable Nutrient Management Project regional field trials, where they assessed organic nutrient management strategies that are most likely to balance goals of crop production and environmental stewardship.

A key takeaway is the importance of regionally-specific nutrient management recommendations due to the big differences in soil types, availability, and cost of amendments. Taking soil tests and applying nutrients based on a farm-specific soil management strategy is important for land stewardship across all regions, but regional variances due to differing soils, climate, and access to and cost of amendments are important considerations.

For example, the abundance of nutrient-rich animal manures in the Fraser Valley increases the possibility of unintentionally over applying nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P). This can result in post-harvest nitrate and phosphorus concentrations that can compromise well water quality and wetland health in the area, and are higher than what is permitted under BC's new Agricultural Environmental Management Regulation.

There are also cost implications of over-applying nutrients. On Vancouver Island, where amendments are relatively expensive, targeted nutrient applications based on soil testing and matching crop nutrient demand can allow for signif-

icant savings compared to applying amendments without that knowledge.

Climate Resilient Vegetable Farming

SAL's Climate Resilient Vegetable Farming research project is studying the interactions between organic nutrient management and water issues (e.g. too much, too little, wrong timing) on organic farms. Increased fall and spring precipitation shortens the soil workability time window, thus shortening the growing season and increasing the challenge of establishing and incorporating cover crops as part of a nutrient management strategy.

Raelani Kesler, Master of Science student, explained that the Climate Resilient Vegetable Farming research project hopes to quantify the impact of three alternative approaches to soil management: fall application of organic amendments, tile drains, and overwinter tarping. Silage tarps are increasingly being used to cover soil in places where it is difficult to establish or maintain a cover crop. With tarping, the soil is protected from erosion, but there are no inputs from cover crop biomass. Drainage tiles are being used to manage moisture but this too can lead to losses. The project is currently gearing up for its second field season.

Knowledge Sharing

The benefit of having the research on-farm extends beyond the access to regional data. Including farmers as partners

allows for horizontal learning between both researchers and farmers, as well as supporting farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange.

Amy Norgaard, a Master of Science student in SAL, spoke to the knowledge-sharing elements of the project. “I was able to be physically on farm having conversations with the farmers and learning from them about what they do and why, and was able to incorporate each farm’s unique amendment strategy into the study,” she said. “Farmers were able to see how their ‘business as usual’ compost and fertilizer applications compared to strategies targeting N and P crop demand, and also saw how their strategies compared to other farmers.”

Chris Bodnar, a project farm partner, said “The on-farm research and collaborative sharing of results was incredible for us to be part of”.

Although not a direct goal of the program, Norgaard shared that getting out and having conversations with partner farmers allowed her to gain useful information that she was then able to share across the community. “I really enjoyed the relationship building and knowledge sharing aspects of the program and wish I could continue doing it even though my two-year research project has come to an end. I think there is a lot of value there.”

In the Kootenays, SAL was able to partner with Rachael Roussin of the Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA) program. KBFA has been providing extension services for farmers for several years, and Kesler said the established relationships and close contact Rachael had with growers made it much more feasible to conduct regional field trials in the Kootenays. For example, Rachael was able to reach out to her network to recruit farm research partners. Her existing relationships and proximity to the growers made it easier to check in about details, such as when they were planning on removing their tarps so she could get to the farm to take a soil sample. Coordinating on this level would be very difficult to do from UBC and so having a partner like KBFA opens up regional on-farm research possibilities that wouldn’t exist otherwise. Kesler hopes to see more regions across BC adopt similar extension programs that would allow for these forms of university-farm partnerships to become more widespread.

Similar Approaches Happening Across Canada

The topic of collaborative on-farm research with mother-sister sites, and the many benefits of approaching agricultural research this way, also came up at a recent meeting I attended for provincial and federal organic specialists. The Quebec organic specialists spoke highly of the mother-daughter model to ensure a constant exchange and mutual learning between farmers and researchers.

In 2019 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada announced a new Living Laboratory Initiative. Similar to UBC’s SAL

lab, it will use mother-sister sites as part of a “collaborative approach to research that will bring stakeholders together on working farms to develop, test and adopt new practices and technologies that will tackle important environmental issues.”

You can find more details about this announcement here:

agr.gc.ca/eng/scientific-collaboration-and-research-in-agriculture/living-laboratories-initiative/?id=1551383721157

Organic Vegetable Nutrient Management Project

sal-lab.landfood.ubc.ca/projects/organic-vegetable-nutrient-management



BC’s New Agricultural Environmental Management Regulation:

gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/waste-management/industrial-waste/agriculture

The Organic Vegetable Nutrient Management Project and the Climate Resilient Vegetable Farming Project were funded in part by 1) the Farm Adaptation Innovator Program (FAIP), a program through the BC Climate Action Initiative and funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial; and 2) the 2) Organic Science Cluster 3 under the AgriScience program of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Emma Holmes is the Organics Industry Specialist with the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries. She studied Sustainable Agriculture and Soil Science at UBC, and then farmed on Salt Spring and worked on a permaculture homestead on Orcas Island. She now lives in Vernon with her partner and toddler, and loves spending time in the garden. She can be reached at:

Emma.Holmes@gov.bc.ca

The advertisement for Pro Organics features a vertical strip of images on the left showing various fresh produce like tomatoes and leafy greens. To the right, the Pro Organics logo is displayed with a stylized leaf above the text. Below the logo, it says "produce & fresh food". The main text reads "Canada's premier distributor of certified organic fresh food". At the bottom, the website "www.ProOrganics.com" is listed.



Bringing History into Modern Cider-Making *at Twin Island Cider*

Photos and words by Katie Selbee

“**N**atural” has always been a concept at the centre of our cider production, and over the past year I have been able to bring that ideal into our most basic equipment: fermentation vessels.

Just over a year ago, we were at a point of deciding whether to invest in more wood barrels or stainless-steel tanks for our production space, when I stumbled upon a documentary about ancient Georgian wine qvevri. Qvevri are large earthenware vessels used for fermenting and storing wine. These huge, handbuilt clay pots are still being made today in Georgia just the same as they have been made for thousands of years, even down to the native clay they dig themselves.

This launched me on an investigation into whether our native Gulf Islands clay—Twin Island Cider is based on



Top: Katie Selbee putting the finishing touches on two Qvevri. Above: Raw clay is collected from a large pile of clay, unearthed some years ago when our cidery partners/landholders Sandra and Noel had an irrigation pond dug.



Top left: The clay is mixed with water into a slurry and then poured through a fine mesh to remove any coarse particles and rocks. Top right: The clay is then settled-out and allowed to dry until it is elastic and workable. Above: The vessels are hand built without a pottery wheel, in the traditional style of Georgian qvevri. One 3-inch layer is added per day. A 150-litre pot takes about 12 days total. Inset: This clay turns a beautiful terracotta colour once fired.



Opposite page, top: Katie Selbee and Matthew Vasilev at their clay harvest site.

Opposite page, bottom left: Once dry, the vessels are kiln-fired to 1060 degrees Celsius. Most native, hand-processed clays like this cannot be fired much higher or they will warp and melt. This clay turns a beautiful terracotta colour once fired (see inset on page 17).

Opposite page, bottom right: After firing, they are re-warmed and lined with melted beeswax, also a traditional Georgian method. The heating opens up the larger pores of the clay, allowing them to absorb the wax while still leaving smaller pores open to allow micro-oxidation and direct clay contact.

Pender Island—might be usable for low-fire earthenware, too. Luckily, a few test firings confirmed that it was.

Though I haven't worked much with clay in the past, I am also lucky to have a professional potter living next door (Nancy Walker of talkingclay.ca). As I learn from her advice as well as footage of Georgian qvevri-building, I have been hand-building pots and gradually scaling up to vessels that hold around 150 litres, measuring about 35 inches tall. When I can problem-solve finding or building a larger sized kiln, I will scale up to larger sizes. For now, we are busy experimenting with fermenting and aging in the earthen clay and learning as much as we can about its effects on the finished cider.

It's hard to say what impact using qvevri will have on the cider itself at this point as we've only made one batch and have been occasionally tasting another that is still aging in the clay. The first batch we made has a wonderfully punchy, tangy character, and we did notice it has a more mature profile than other ciders would be at its young age, likely due to the micro-oxidation effects mellowing the acids faster. We'll do more comparative batches as we go—aging the same batch in stainless with clay to compare. It is safe to say this is a direction we will wholeheartedly be pursuing and improving on for the long term.

The main reason we are excited about clay is that it imparts less flavour than most wooden barrels, but it still allows some micro-oxidation—unlike stainless steel. And it also adds another layer of “terroir” that makes so much sense for our hyper-local cider: fermenting and aging in the material of its home. 🍷

📍 twinislandcider.com

Katie Selbee and her partner Matthew Vasilev are the cider-makers and co-founders of Twin Island Cider on Pender Island, blending hands-on experience and training in cider-making, orcharding, and farming. Twin Island Cider began with making cider on a basket press with family and friends, using apples from old orchards and the Vasilev's family trees on Pender Island before developing into a land-based cidery in 2016 when they partnered with land-holders Sandra MacPherson and Noel Hall. They are immersed in operating the cidery year-round, from pruning

and harvesting dozens of island orchards, pressing, blending and bottling, to pouring the cider at the tasting room. They care for and harvest from dozens of century-old settler orchards on North and South Pender Islands to create their fine, low-intervention cider and perry fermented only with native yeasts—cider which seeks to communicate the land, the lost varieties and the stories of the place we live.



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iCertify Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms



*A selection of certified organic mushrooms.
Credit: Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms*

By Corinne Impey

Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms is a family-run seasonal mushroom farm in Kaslo, BC.

Now in their fifth year of business, and their second year being BC Certified Organic, they specialize in gourmet mushroom varieties such as shiitake, oyster, and lion's mane, among many others. They also produce spawn, grow-at-home kits, and other cultivation supplies.

As a member of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society (KOGS), Robin Mercy of Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms was able to use iCertify for the first time in 2021 to complete their annual certification online.

“Although there were some small redundancies as I moved over from the old system to iCertify, I felt that for the most part the system was intuitive and there wasn't too much of a learning curve,” says Robin. “There was a bit of work to be done reformatting some of my information to align with



Robin Mercy. Credit: Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms.



Reishi mushroom. Credit: Mr. Mercy's Mushrooms.

new wordings and questions, but I'm hopeful that come 2022, a renewal should be much easier using this system."

Robin was one of many operators from KOGS who used iCertify for the 2021 season.

"KOGS was very excited to begin transitioning part of our membership this year to the iCertify platform," says Emma Sowiak, KOGS chair. This was in part because it meant lightening the load on their certification committee—by moving away from boxes of hefty paper files—and also because it afforded them the opportunity to refresh their current application.

"iCertify has added more scope and detail to the application process, especially for our specialty growers like Robin. For example, this gives both the operator and the

certification committee a better understanding of what is involved in growing organic mushrooms!"

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For Robin at Mr. Mercy’s Mushrooms, a few key features in iCertify stood out.

“I think the way that it’s possible to choose which sections apply to your operation is really important. As a producer of mushrooms that are container-grown in greenhouses, there’s a lot of differences between my application and a typical soil-based crop application, and it’s nice to be able to choose up-front which parts of the application are relevant.”

He also used iCertify’s newest feature, a searchable database of input products that have already been approved by each participating certifying body (CB) for use in organic production.


This new feature includes a simplified way for members to request and receive approval for products directly from within the iCertify portal. It also includes the ability for each member to track their own list of approved products and monitor the approval expiry dates.

“Most of my inputs had not been listed yet, but I think it’ll be easy and quick to get input approval in the future once the list is expanded,” says Robin. “And even though individual CBs are still responsible for approving inputs and applications, it’s nice to have some shared information.”

Beyond completing his application and looking forward to using the approved products database, Robin also says iCertify has great value for the industry as a whole.

“I think it’s important to have a standardized application process province-wide, and an online one like iCertify seems like the best choice.”

Now that his online application has been submitted, Robin is looking ahead to what the rest of 2021 has in store for Mr. Mercy’s Mushrooms.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, there’s been a big increase in inquiries about growing supplies,” says Robin. “We’re responding to that need by focusing on producing high quality kits and spawn, and creating educational media and courses outlining ways to grow mushrooms at home. We are also working to get more of our products available for online purchase. On the fresh mushroom front, we’re hoping to increase production by around 50%, and expand our Mushroom Box CSA program to Nelson, BC. It’s a lot to keep up with, but should be a very exciting year for us!” 

Funding for this project has been provided by the Governments of Canada and British Columbia through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, under the Canada-BC Agri-Innovation Program. The program is delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.



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Regenerative Agriculture is the Way of the Future

Certification is Helping Define Best Practices

By Travis Forstbauer

This article first appeared in Country Life in BC and is reprinted here with gratitude.

Soil health is the foundation of any healthy organic farm. While modern agriculture has primarily focused on nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, soil health from an organic perspective focuses on the health and diversity of microscopic and macroscopic life in the soil.

The foundation of all life is carbon, so on an organic farm, soil health can often be directly related to soil organic matter (soil carbon). So, it is with cautious optimism that the BC Association for Regenerative Agriculture (BCARA) welcomes the renewed focus on regenerative agriculture.

Use of the term “regenerative agriculture” has exploded over the past few years. However, this is not a new philosophy. In North America, Indigenous peoples had been practicing forms of regenerative agriculture for thousands of years before the Europeans came and settled. In more recent times, during the early 20th century after the indus-

trialization of agriculture, European farmers were noticing significant decreasing crop yields. Rudolf Steiner attributed this in part to depleted soil health and gave instruction that laid the foundation for biodynamic agriculture, a regenerative system of agriculture dedicated to building soil life.

Then through the mid to late 20th century, pioneers like J.I. Rodale, Lady Balfour, Robert Rodale, and the lesser-known Ehrenfried Pfeiffer championed organic agriculture practices that, at their heart, were regenerative. Through the 1980s and 1990s this movement blossomed to what is known as organic agriculture.

In 1986, as part of the early organic agriculture movement, a group of farmers in the Fraser Valley organized themselves to create the BCARA. An early definition of regenerative agriculture that they settled on was:

BCARA went on to become a leader in the early organic movement in BC, where, at the grassroots of organic agriculture, was the belief that every organic farm should strive to be regenerative in its practices. Soil health expressed as life in the soil, has always been the foundation of organic agriculture.

“Regenerative Agriculture is both a philosophy and a farm management system. Philosophically, it says that

Continued on page 27...

Incubating Certified Organic Farmers at Haliburton



Erin Bett showing off a bucket full of dahlias. Credit: Fierce Love Farm

By Erin Bett

Our farm, Fierce Love Farm, is a one-acre vegetable, fruit, and flower farm in Saanich on unceded W_SÁNEĆ territory. We are part of Haliburton Community Organic Farm, which is a beautiful piece of farmland in the middle of the Victoria suburbs.

Haliburton Farm operates as an incubator farm: new farmers can lease plots between half an acre and one acre for a short-term lease of up to eight years to start their farm business. Our farm, and all the other farmers at Haliburton Farm, are certified organic through the Islands Organic Producers Association (IOPA).

While Haliburton Farm operates somewhat differently than other IOPA incubator farms, since it is run by a non-profit society on publicly owned land, it served as part of the



Jon harvesting leeks. Credit: Fierce Love Farm.



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¹COTA, "The Canadian Organic Market: Trends and Opportunities 2017," November 2017

inspiration for IOPA's incubator farm policy. The incubator farm policy aims to expand the opportunities for new farmers to start organic farms with the support of established IOPA farmers.

We started our farm business at Haliburton Farm in 2018, and are entering our fourth season. After both completing the UBC Farm Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture and working for many years on farms throughout the province, we were ready to take the leap and start our own farm. With land prices what they are in BC, and especially on the west coast, we knew our only option was to lease land. When the opportunity to join Haliburton Farm's incubator model opened up, we jumped at the chance, and have benefited from it greatly.

Farming at an incubator farm gave us the head start that leasing a raw piece of land from a private landowner never could have. With the key infrastructure like hoop houses, irrigation, and a walk-in cooler in place, and existing plantings of cane fruits in the ground, we were able to hit the ground running in our first season.

Kevin Allen, who also started Elemental Farm at Haliburton in 2018, adds, "The incubator policy has created the opportunity to start the farm business in a stable and supportive environment. This will be the fourth year of Elemental Farm's operations and I am grateful this incubator policy exists." He highlights that the incubator allowed them to start small and build their level of investment over time, as their risk tolerance increased. "For example," he says, "we didn't need to invest so heavily in the fixed assets of a cooler."

Our plot had been farmed by two previous farmers before us, so we were also inheriting years of work building the soil. We were incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to work for the farmer whose plot we took over, Northstar Organics, the year prior to starting our farm. Having the mentorship of Shawn Dirksen on the land we would be farming, was invaluable to our business. Hearing his experiences, successes, and cautions gleaned over his time on the land gave us history and knowledge that would have taken years to collect on our own—a true gift to have before even putting pen to paper for our crop and marketing plans. Even three years later, he is only a phone call away to help us troubleshoot.

Being part of an incubator farm also gave us access to existing marketing channels. Our large stall at the local farmers' market already had name recognition, and over the last three years we have worked hard to expand our dedicated customer base. We also partner with three other Haliburton Farm current and former lessees to collectively market our produce to restaurant and small grocer customers, which is coordinated by a fourth former Haliburton Farm lessee.

This combination of support, infrastructure, and our previous experience has allowed us to focus on the thing we

didn't have experience with—running a business. We have since been working to expand our own CSA, as we have always loved the CSA model and the connection with our community that it brings, and grow our farm to bring on more staff and our systems, while we plan for the future and a more permanent home for our farm.

While for us, the thought of starting over on another piece of land is daunting, and the barriers to land access for farmers are all too real, we are grateful that we have been able to start our farm business at Haliburton Farm.

Kevin's farm has grown beyond the borders of Haliburton, too. "Starting last year, we were able to find another plot to lease and expand our plantings," says Kevin. "We've now graduated out of the incubator policy and are continuing to search for more land to lease."

Much needs to be done to make sure we set up the next generation of organic farmers for success, and incubator farms like Haliburton Farm are an important piece of the farm landscape. Haliburton Farm is celebrating its 20th year of operation this year, and as a member of the IOPA certification committee, I'm so excited to see applications from new farmers, who are being mentored by established organic farmers under the incubator farm policy. 🌱

If you would like more information about IOPA's Incubator Policy and you are located within IOPA's region of Vancouver Island and surrounding islands, reach out to:

✉ admin@iopa.ca.

Erin Bett farms at Fierce Love Farm, a diverse, small-scale, organic farm located at Haliburton Community Organic Farm in Saanich, BC. Erin and her farm partner Jon are two first-generation farmers growing a variety of high-quality vegetables, berries, and flowers on one acre of leased land.

✉ fiercelovefarm.ca



there is within people, plants, animals and the world itself a way of recovery that both comes from within and carries the recovery process beyond previous levels of well-being. Robert Rodale says, “Regeneration begins with the realization that the natural world around us is continually trying to get better and better.

“Over the past 30 years much has changed in both organic and conventional agriculture and over the past few years the term “regenerative agriculture” has been loosely used for a variety of farming systems. There is a general understanding that a regenerative farming system captures carbon and helps to mitigate climate change. There are many organizations that have jumped onto this wave of regenerative agriculture. But the term “regenerative agriculture” is not regulated like the term organic. There is no governing body overseeing the use of this term and as a result it has been loosely used and often misused and this is of concern to BCARA.”

There are some that believe that no-till agriculture systems are more regenerative than organic systems that perform some tillage. However, we fundamentally disagree with this assertion. Many of these no-till systems still rely on toxic herbicides such as glyphosate, and while we applaud agriculture producers’ actions to build soil life, capture carbon, and mitigate climate change, BCARA holds the position that any form of agriculture with the goal to be regenerative should have a foundation of organic practices.

BCARA believes that the healthiest, cleanest food is produced in a regenerative agricultural system, without the use of herbicides, pesticides, and agrochemicals. Regenerative agriculture strives to be a closed loop system whereas the production of these agrochemicals is CO₂ intensive and are often produced long distances from the farm.

In the US, a regenerative agriculture standard has been developed called Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC). This certification requires the operation to be certified organic to be designated as regenerative. Certification is on a tiered system of bronze, silver, and gold. The farm is granted certification based on how many regenerative practices they use on their farm as defined in the ROC standard. It is our view that this is the gold standard of regenerative certification.

Currently, there are countless researchers, soil advocates, and organizations doing the much-needed work to shift the collective focus of agriculture towards regenerative practices. These people and organizations include Gabe Brown, Elaine Ingham, Matt Powers, Zach Bush of Farmers Footprint, Maria Rodale and the Rodale Institute, Ryland Engelhart and Finnian Makepeace from the film Kiss the Ground, the Regenerative Organic Alliance, the Canadian Organic Trade Association, and the list goes on and on.



Travis Forstbauer on the farm. Credit: Forstbauer Farm

Much like organic agriculture has evolved, the understanding of regenerative agriculture will continue to evolve and BCARA looks forward to being a leading voice for regenerative agriculture in BC.

bcara.ca

Travis Forstbauer is president of BCARA, an organic certification body that certifies farms and businesses across the province of BC. He farms alongside his wife and children, his father Hans, his brother Niklaus and his family, sister Rosanna and many other family members throughout the growing season. Together they steward Forstbauer Farm, a multigenerational, certified organic, biodynamic farm located in Chilliwack.

forstbauer.com

2021 BC Organic Conference Recap



*Conference photo contest winner - category: closeup.
Credit: Big Rock Ranch*

By Stacey Santos

You've heard it a thousand times, but I'm going to say it again. This past year was a year like no other. The pandemic affected—and continues to affect—every aspect of our lives: our health, our social lives, our businesses. It's been a year of humbling learning experiences, pivoting to new directions, and figuring out that it really doesn't matter if your naked toddler interrupts your Zoom call to ask you for help with her dragon costume.

Throughout all of this, we've watched the organic community come together under pressure and become stronger and more supportive than ever. And while the ride isn't over yet, we were so happy to be able to take a moment and reconnect with many of you at the 2021 BC Organic Conference.

This year's conference took place on February 28, 2021 and was entirely virtual (we hoped we would be able to carry out some socially distanced farm tours, but alas). Conference attendees had early access to 40-plus podcasts spanning all aspects of food systems and organic farming in BC as well as a chance to bid on some fantastically creative items in the silent auction.

The live event was a giant Zoom call with opening remarks from Heather Stretch (COABC president), Eva-Lena Lang (COABC executive director), Ian Paton (opposition critic for agriculture) and the Honourable Lana Popham (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries), who hinted at big announcements coming from the provincial government on food hubs, support for local seed production, and changes to meat regulations!

Farmers Take the Lead

Next up was the conference keynote from Darrin Qualman, Director of Climate Crisis Policy & Action at the National Farmers Union. Darrin spoke about emission problems and organic agriculture solutions, and wrapped up with a Q&A session with conference attendees. In case you missed it, or want to relive the conference magic, you can watch Darrin's presentation on our YouTube channel.

[youtube.com/watch?v=ammJ2qVXuuo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ammJ2qVXuuo)

COABC Awards...with a Virtual Twist

Normally, our annual COABC awards are presented at the conference's closing banquet. This year, we obviously couldn't do that—so our conference coordinator, Jordan Marr, got creative.

In our conference podcast, we surprised the award recipients with the news, and at our live conference session, we gave them a chance to say a few words in front of their peers. And, gave their peers a chance to say a few words about them!

This year, Mary Alice Johnson and Rod Reid received the Bedrock Award, and Arzeena Hamir took home the Brad Reid Award. There isn't enough room here to say all that needs to be said, so please head over to our blog to learn more about the winners and why they're so incredibly deserving of their awards.

bcorganicgrower.ca/2021/02/2021-coabc-award-winners

And so Much More

Conference attendees also took part in three Q&A sessions with podcast guests and voted on their favourite images in the photo contest. The live session wrapped up with a small group visioning discussion, to take the pulse of the COABC community and make sure the organization knows what's going on and what's important to everyone. It was a great discussion with some big ideas, and as always, we thank you for sharing your thoughts so honestly and generously.

A big part of what made this conference so special (other than seeing so many of your shining faces, of course), was all the planning and work that went into it. This was a brand-new format for us, and it took many folks wearing many different hats to make it happen!

For some final insights into the conference and some thoughts on what's next, I caught up with Jordan, this year's conference coordinator and podcast producer for Q&A:

The 2021 BC Organic Conference was a radical change from past conferences. How did it all come about?

The first question for the conference committee was to decide whether we'd have a conference at all, and in what format. As a committee we collectively decided it was worth having something for continuity, and because we could produce something of value. We knew we couldn't reproduce the social component, but could reproduce the networking and education components in some way. We decided to have a virtual conference and started brainstorming!

I suggested that we consider making an audio series rather than webinars, which tie attendees to a screen. A podcast is a great way to consume information and would be more accommodating to people's busy lives. The committee briefly talked about it and ultimately agreed it was a good idea. That was the first major decision and from there we came up the rest of the details.

The podcast really was the centrepiece of the conference in terms of the amount of content it involved. How did you pull it off?

I had produced a hobby podcast for years and I'm super comfortable with the basic technology and the audio software. No question marks there.

But, this was the first time I oversaw a team of interviewers. The volunteer interviewers were really great! In some ways, organizing the interviews wasn't all that different from organizing speakers at the conference. But, it's cheaper and easier to get people involved. It was a really busy November and December when the podcast got recorded and produced.



Conference photo contest winner - category: Fail.
Credit: Spray Creek Ranch

From a coordinator's perspective, how did the conference go?

I think the most positive way to look at it is that we had to start from scratch and figure out what to do. If someone from the future told us we'd have almost 200 people participating, and a podcast with almost 40 episodes, not including the tradeshow episodes...

Overall the conference was fairly well received, and so was the podcast. One special thing about the podcast is that it very much turned into a podcast about the BC organic community, by the BC organic community. Not many farming and food podcasts are so focused on British Columbia. That's something worth keeping in the future.

And the live session—I underestimated how special it would feel. I was skeptical of the online communication space. And after the year we've all had, it was really cool. If I had to do it all over again, I would have created a few more opportunities for small group interaction. The day was weighted too heavily towards large groups.

There's talk of carrying the podcast into future years, even if we're able to hold an in-person conference. Is there anything you would change?

For this year's podcast, I took a light touch to editing. Next year I would consider having fewer episodes, with more time invested in each one.

An ongoing challenge, even in prior years, is choosing the right topics for the education sessions. That can only come from good participation. It's hard for a small committee—

even one like ours with good representation—to create a lineup of topics that would please a wide group of people. There's a bias towards small to medium scale farmers, and with a committee, there's also a bias towards the members' own interests. And I can't stress enough—I represent those biases.

When it comes to decision making, I had great support from the committee. But when the rubber hit the road, I made the decisions and I take responsibility for that. The podcast could have seen more representation as far as identity politics, gender perspectives, and people of colour. Also glaringly absent was enough content from BC-based Indigenous peoples.

It doesn't hurt to try harder to get more perspectives presented, whether it's the size of the farms or the perspective of different groups in the province.

Any parting thoughts?

It's really great that so many people embraced this new idea. And if we have to do it again in this format, we'll improve. We'll miss the social elements though!

... Tulaberry, continued from page 11

“They essentially bought a raw piece of land more than 30 years ago and through sheer hard work and determination they slowly built a home in the woods and a farm, structure by structure, until it became the beautiful property that is it today.” This has shown the new farmers that “even if your dream lifestyle seems daunting to achieve, if you stick with it long enough and don't give up, you can accomplish almost anything.”

This winter, their first on the farm, they were busy! “We added a bakery section to the online shop so that we can offer more than just vegetables,” says Emily. “We use chicken eggs from the farm, local cream when available, and locally-sourced grain that we mill using our Komo mill. This has helped to differentiate our business as well as increase our sales when we don't have a lot of vegetables to sell throughout the winter. We're doing row crops and Judi is teaching us how to do broiler chickens.”

Reflecting on the experience of sharing land with Emily and Nathan so far, Judi says she has been “pleasantly surprised with their generosity of spirit,” while Emily and Nathan spoke to how “easy and seamless it has been. Judi and Alex have been incredibly generous from the very beginning and we could tell they just want to see us succeed.”

Emily and Nathan aspire to one day transition from farmers markets and CSAs to a farm-to-table bakery they plan to call Pantry. “Our dream would be to be able to grow and produce as many ingredients for the bakery as we can to make it a true farm-to-table experience,” Emily says. As for where Judi sees herself and the farm in 20 years, she

And, as a coordinator, I really had a lot of help with great support from the office. I had a lot of fun getting to know all the people. I also noticed more people signing up to play a small role in next year's conference committee. The committee is mainly comprised of people on the COABC board or the board of a certifying body, but anyone's welcome to join. On the conference evaluation, if you want to put your name forward, please do!

A big thanks to everyone who made the 2021 BC Organic Conference possible: Jordan Marr, volunteer interviewers, podcast guests, conference committee members, COABC staff & contractors, event sponsors, silent auction donors and the Institute for Community Engaged Research at UBC Okanagan for offering technical expertise, tools, and a physical space for broadcasting the online event. Until next year! 🌱

says, “at the age of 93, I hope to be taking care of chickens, even if I am not farming too much, but I hope the farm remains. I see so many possibilities—instead of withdrawing my energy, this new life on the farm is expanding it.” 🌱

Confluence Farms:

📍 confluencefarms.ca

Young Agrarians BC Transition Toolkit for Non-Family Farm Transfer:

📍 youngagrarians.org/bc-transition-toolkit/

BC Land Matching Program:

📍 youngagrarians.org/land

The BC Land Matching Program is funded by the Province of British Columbia, with support from Columbia Basin Trust, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Bullitt Foundation, and Patagonia.

Hailey Troock grew up in the small agricultural community of Oyama, located in the Okanagan. Now based in Nelson, she spends her time connecting farmers, landholders, and allies in the Columbia Basin region as a Land Matcher with the BC Land Matching Program delivered by Young Agrarians.

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