

April 11 2017

Canadian Organic Associations meet with Minister MacAulay

The organic sector is facing important challenges: the proposed Safe Food for Canadians Regulations, the maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards and maintaining the Canada Organic Office activities to deliver services to Canadian organic operators were discussed at the meeting held April 11 2017 with Minister Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Tia Loftsgard (COTA), Wally Hamm (Pro-Cert), Nicole Boudreau (OFC), Ashley St-Hilaire (COG), Paddy Doherty (OVCRT).

The OFC presentation about the maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards is presented below.



Tia Loftsgard (COTA), Wally Hamm (Pro-Cert), Nicole Boudreau (OFC), Minister MacAulay, Ashley St-Hilaire (COG), Paddy Doherty (OVCRT)

BRIEFING NOTE FOR MINISTER MACAULAY

Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Government of Canada

PURPOSE

As outlined in the 2017 federal budget, Canada plans to increase investment in agriculture and clean resources; the Budget 2017 is showing a clear concern for air and water quality, “with a

focus on addressing emerging priorities, such as climate change and soil and water conservation” (Budget 2017, p. 108).

So the purpose of this note is to inform the Minister of an issue that threatens the Canadian organic industry: the lack of funding for the maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards that are the pillar of the Canadian organic production and trade, and an essential tool for the preservation of Canada’s pristine natural environment.

BACKGROUND

- The Canadian Organic Standards (COS) that define organic production systems in Canada are to be revised every five years. The five year review is an international ISO requirement that insures the validity of our standard which is owned by the Canadian General Standards Board.
- Our COS are referenced by our Canadian regulatory system. A certification system has been put in place to guide local and international consumers who are looking for Canadian organic food.
- Because we review and maintain our standard, Canada can establish equivalency agreements with our international trading partners and export our certified organic products all around the world, including Asia “where some three billion people are expected to join the middle class over the next two decades, demand is changing, with consumers seeking out more high quality foods and more protein” (Budget 2017, p. 95).
- The organic standard defines management practices that concentrates on protecting biodiversity and water and soil quality. Canada plans to become a leader in protecting biodiversity; “around the world, biodiversity is declining, threatening all life on the planet. In response, countries around the world are reaching or exceeding global conservation targets” and Canada plans to join this movement (Budget 2017, p. 124).

OUR REQUEST

The Canadian Organic Standards (COS) promote soil and water conservation, support biodiversity, and offer clean and sustainable options for the production of quality food for Canadians and our export markets. It clearly meets our ecological government’s objectives.

The next revision of the Canadian Organic Standards has to be completed by 2020.

Unlike our main trading partners (US and EU), our government does not have a program to fund the upcoming review of our national organic standards.

The USDA (National Organic Program) invests \$500,000 per year for the maintenance of the US organic standards. In Canada, the organic industry has to fund the maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards, a cost that is mainly payable to the Canadian General Standards Board, a government agency involved in standardization.

The cost of the maintenance also includes industry consultations and basic research to determine the environmental impact of the diverse agricultural practices that can modernize organic agriculture.

The organic industry is not satisfied with the absence of support from our government: Canadian organic operators feel that they would pay to maintain standards that promote biodiversity, and water and soil conservation, in addition to paying their certification fees for using the organic label on the 'clean' products consumers want.

We urge our government to support the COS review process and help sustain an ecological agri-food system, as per the objectives of the Budget 2017.

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