

ORGANIC WEEK



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**Pesticides Reduce Bee Colony Growth
and Queen Production**



**Let it be
Grow
Organic**



For a more organic future!

Organic Federation of Canada

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ORGANIC WEDNESDAY

Meet with OFC Directors

The Organic Federation of Canada was launched 5 years ago, when there were no regulations, no mandatory standards, no organic logo and no equivalency agreements.

The Canadian organic industry faced enormous changes during the last five years.

Andy Hammermeister, from OACC, said in an interview that will be published tomorrow that the organic model takes people out of their normal thinking on crop management. So we need to support the work of organic growers.

The OFC directors speak about their experience, how they learnt to grow organically and how they perceive the organic industry today.

Have a nice reading!

Louise and I started farming our market vegetable farm (Wild Flight Farm) with a healthy dose of idealism 20 years ago. Since we had no formal training, we had to learn as much as we could from reading books (Eliot Coleman was a big influence) and trial and error (lots of errors). Luckily we had the benefit of strong family support (moral, financial, and equipment) through the early years but the learning process continues.



Hermann Bruns
COABC

Our main challenge is agreeing on and achieving an appropriate work life balance. Growing vegetables and selling them at farmers' markets eats up so much of the spring, summer, and fall that there is very little time for anything else. And with year-round farmers markets and kids in school, the winter goes by pretty fast too.

The Canadian organic certification system has become too costly and bureaucratic for many of the smaller organic enterprises.

The past 10 years has seen a lot of effort go into addressing the needs of larger operations for internationally recognized organic production and processing standards. Now that those standards are functioning, albeit with some ongoing shortcomings, it is time to focus on ensuring the health and vibrancy of the smaller scale operator and young farmers producing for their local markets.

I think we need to build an entry-level organic certification system as small local enterprises generally don't need and can't afford the same level of certification services put in place to facilitate international trade.



We have been certified organic producers since 1997. We learned how to farm organically by trial and error, but after switching to mostly livestock production (beef cattle) in the early 1990s, it became apparent that the need for chemicals and synthetic fertilizer was becoming unnecessary and that was when we began looking into Organic production and how to become certified.

Our main challenge right now is controlling weeds in uncultivated pasture land. Mainly Canada Thistle. We have found with intensive strip grazing, thistles can be controlled quite well. Still much to learn. As far as soil health and over all fertility, after 15 years of organic production, we feel our farm is in better shape than ever.

I feel the organic industry still has huge potential to grow as far as production of commodities, but I feel for the industry to really thrive, we will need to see more processing done here in Canada.



Terry Sheehan
Organic Alberta

There are many benefits of processing locally such as creating of employment, the useful byproducts that are sometimes produced that can be used locally, and the reduction in freight costs due to not having to truck raw product to the States and then bringing it back as processed store shelf products. I hope we will see a natural evolution of the processing industry in Canada, as it becomes apparent that our industry is here to stay, and consumers want our products on grocery store shelves.

Realistically I don't think we can rely on farmers markets and direct sales to market all of our growing production.



Arnold Taylor
Saskatchewan Organic
Directorate

I have been growing organic food since 1992. I learned by doing and asking questions from more experienced producers. Since 1995 I have been very active in our OCIA Chapter where we work together to improve our methods.

Our current main challenge is our attempt to grow organic crops with less tillage and less summer fallow. I am currently very happy with our organic work.

I think the next step for the organic industry is the need to educate the consumers [all consumers] as to the benefits of eating organic food.



Larry Black
Manitoba Organic Alliance

I am a 3rd generation organic grower. I grew up on an organic farm, and have been producing food organically, on our own farm since 1978. The family homestead will be 100 years chemical free next year. We became certified organic in 1996.

On the crop side, weather, related toxins in the feed, and leaf diseases are quite a challenge. These were not on the radar, a few years ago. We also have to face constant pressure from companies wanting to introduce more GMO crops and we have to improve the marketing of both crops and milk

Our next steps are to develop strategies to protect our market share from the 'Natural' label, and combat negative press.

We have to secure funding for maintenance of the COS and create a structure for small producers to participate in the organic sector.



I have been growing organically since 1994 on this farm, but was raised an “organic kid” by parents who had the Rodale books. My farm has been Certified Organic by PACS since 2006, although today I have a split operation with two hogs that aren't of organic parents.

I learned by reading and listening to others farmers, both in the Yukon and outside. I took the six day compost and microscopy course from Dr. Elaine Ingham in Corvallis Oregon in 2007.

My main challenge is trying to do too much in our short season. I have had WWOOFers and interns in the past but finding good help is always the challenge.

We have to ensure the supply of organic feed for our animals and organic seed for growing. I guess the step should be to ensure an uncontaminated source of both of these (from GMO).



Joanne Jackson Johnson
Growers of Organic Food
Yukon

I began organic farming when I met some immigrants from Germany and Switzerland who knew how to employ organic methods in the old country and were managing successful organic farms here in Canada. That was 1983. At first I thought it would be great to save some money on fertilizer and sprays, but when I went to the first meeting of the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario, I started to learn about soil biology, and it fit so well with my knowledge of ecology and love of nature, that I was quickly converted and vowed to use no more toxins on the land. Fortunately, these guys were willing to hold my hand through the transition, to teach me about crop rotation and weed control, composting of manure and preventing health problems in livestock. By 1986 I was ready for certification on my mixed dairy and cash-crop farm.



Ted Zettel



The greatest challenge came about 15 years into farming without fertilizer, when my soil started to show a deficiency of Phosphorus, which, combined with high Magnesium and high pH, made it difficult to establish and sustain legumes, which were the foundation of the Nitrogen cycle. It was also a time when we had drought about seven years out of ten, so it took me quite a while to identify the problem and by then it was not easy to fix. Early in my career, around 1988 an old, retired professor from the University of Guelph had heard me describe my program at a farm meeting, and had come up to me afterward, encouraging me that what I was doing would work, but advising me to get a little rock phosphate and add it to the manure. This was not part of the formula I had learned from the Europeans, so I didn't heed his advice. Ten years later, studying old agricultural journals, I found that P. depletion was a common historical feature on dairy farms.

The organic industry must organize itself effectively in order to protect the core values of working with nature, sustainability and health. The expansion of scale that accompanies wider recognition is already threatening to water down these values. The farmer has really driven this movement, in concert with an awakened, health conscious consumer. We need to be vigilant and not let control slip into the hands of commercial interests who are motivated primarily by profit.

This is difficult, since most of the passionate pioneers would rather spend their time living the organic life – in the field or the barn, or serving customers. They don't like going to meetings and paying for organizations like the Organic Federation of Canada or its provincial member organizations. But these groups; representing a broad base of organic operators, and committed to transparency and democratic decision making, are our only vehicle for resisting the natural evolution of organic farming into a slightly more benign version of the industrial method. We are much more than that – we are champions of an alternative paradigm that the world desperately needs and so we have to fight to maintain our integrity.



We started transitioning to organic farming on our farm in 1995, after a project with the Organic Agriculture Center of Ste-Élizabeth de Warwick (now closed). In 1999, the cranberry food processing project with Fruit d'Or was established to market our organic cranberries.

Organic production has not always been an easy ride. Yields were very low during the first years. Many research projects on insects, fertilization, and organic control of weeds were done. We have developed tools adapted to our conditions.

Today, yields are better though still lower than those of conventional agriculture. We are very proud of our cultural practices, and Quebec has become the world leader in organic cranberry production.

We have to take our place on the Canadian markets. The organic market continues to grow and we should get our fair share. Producers should work together to obtain and share services, equipment and high-quality training and advice, so that they can access markets and be competitive.

We have to reach consumers through large distribution chains and short supply circuits.



Martin Le Moine
Filière biologique du Québec



Joyce Kelly
PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-operative

I have been farming certified organically since 1997, both my husband and I grew up on small mixed farms growing a number of crops. We did attend info sessions offered through conferences and workshops. We work with my brother and sister who also operate organic farms and so we share information.

Our worst challenge is the change in climate; we have to adjust our planting and cultivating practices to suit. We need more information on how to deal with new pests and weeds that can now thrive in our climate, and may need to adjust the types of crops that we produce.

We need to keep our standards updated and realistic with the growth of the industry. We need to have support from the various levels of government for this. Without the support the increase in production will be much slower.

I have been growing organic food for about 10 years and learned through conferences, reading, practice and some mentoring.

I would say the main challenge is the recognition of what organic means and the lack of regulations within provincial boundaries.

The Canadian organic industry needs to simplify the organic certification process and reduce the cost while also extending the regulations to all growers claiming organic production whether they are selling within the province or not.



The main challenge remains the lack of an intra-provincial enforcement of the federal standard or provincial standard.

Folks are giving up certification as they watch many others calling themselves organic without being certified organic with impunity. We miss government support as in other Maritime provinces.

OCNS is still working on a strategy for NS. Next step for Canadian industry is to focus on keeping the smaller operations certified through continued efforts/discussions with provincial governments. Let's get some benefit back to the smaller folks who actually worked very hard to get the federal regulation in place. So far all benefits have gone to the large companies.



Tim Livingstone
New-Brunswick Organic
Working group/ACORN



Angela Patterson
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