

January 2013

Organic Conferences' season

Winter season is the meeting season for many farmers. COABC is celebrating its 20th anniversary; Ted Zettel, President of OFC/FBC, will give the presentation, *Regulating Canada's Organic Food – The Good and the Bad* at the [BC organic sector Conference](#), Sunday February 24th at 8 am PT. OFC will also hold its AGM in Vernon February 22nd, from 9am to 12 am PT. The AGM agenda is presented on last page of InfoBio.

Ted Zettel will also present *Regulating Canada's Organic Food – The Good and the Bad*, February 26th at 5:15 pm MT, at the Organic Alberta Conference and AGM – Building Sustainability – The Organic Way. The full OA Conference program is available [here](#).

And the Guelph conference will be launched next week; below, an interview with Tomás Nimmo, the manager of the Guelph organic event.



The Guelph Organic Conference and Expo
**The "mid-winter
organic experience."**

An interview with Tomás Nimmo,
the Guelph Conference & Expo manager.

When did you launch the 1st Conference in Guelph?

1982, started as a couple of afternoon seminars by 2 grad students. It was run for the next 9 years by the student group Guelph Ag. Alternatives but was then taken over by a coalition of non-profits in 1992. It was incorporated in 2003 as Organic Food Conferences Canada.

Why Guelph?

Guelph is the heart of agribusiness development for universities in Canada. I can't think of a more logical venue to run an organic marketing event.



Tomás Nimmo giving out excellent door prizes from Ontario Natural Food Co-op (ONFC) that were drawn at the Organic Food & Wine Dinner of the Guelph Organic Conference & Expo.

What is your main challenge in organizing the Conference year after year?

Managing people's expectations. We serve 10 distinct audiences who all come and pay their entry fees: large-scale certified organic producers, large-scale conventional producers, smallholders & market gardeners, newbies/wannabees who are just about to buy land, organic grain processing trade, organic certification & inspection personnel, consumers, students, researchers & others who are simply curious, even though they do not yet buy any organic foods or even know what it means.

Why should operators and consumers attend the Conference?

This is the largest gathering of certified organic food production in Canada. With 35 organic food sampling booths + a huge array of suppliers serving the organic marketing & production sectors, plus all the federal and provincial non-profits supporting organic agriculture, this is literally the mid-winter gathering point in central Canada. The natural audience for this event is the 15 million people within 250 miles of Guelph.



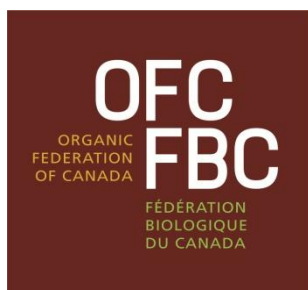
What do you want them to remember from their visit?

How exhausted they were. Literally, standing in the middle of the 159-booth Expo on Feb. 2nd, guests will not know whether to sample organic ice cream or negotiate for that great piece of equipment for their 10-acre market garden. Maybe they'll try to do both at the same time. Also, they should remember that we want them to take away bag loads of organic food samples and to remember that they just had "a mid-winter organic experience."

“With the public hungry for organic info, we think that Guelph, mid-winter, with a free Expo, is still the ideal place to see the glory of the whole Canadian organic sector.”

And your objectives for 2013, 2014, 2015. 2016...are:

In our 32nd year, looking forward to the upcoming years, we hope to continue running a relevant 35-40 workshop program which the organic public will appreciate. Also, with 159 Expo tables and now turning away people, we hope to keep up the high quality of vendors and certified organic products. We never claimed to be the leader because there are lots of great events out there which serve the organic farmer: ACORN, Organic Connections, the COABC event, the COG-Toronto event, the Cornwall EcoFarm, etc. But we happen to be at the nexus of many currents, at Guelph, in the heart of a huge population. Hope to see you there!



OFC AGM in BC February 22nd 2013

The Organic Federation of Canada will hold its Annual General Meeting
Friday February 22nd, from 9am to 12am, Pacific Time,

at the Aberdeen room of the [Prestige Hotel](#),
4411 32nd Street, Vernon, BC, V1T 9G8.

The 2013 OFC AGM will include a panel discussion about the regulatory provincial background that prevails in Canada. The panel, composed of special guests will analyze the following question: **Should certification be mandatory for all organic operators on local, regional and provincial markets?**

All Canadian organic stakeholders are invited to attend the OFC AGM and panel discussion, in-person or by teleconference. The AGM Agenda can be [downloaded here](#) and is added as an appendix to the InfoBio.

Be our guest!

Short news....



Under the Canadian Organic Standards, can commercial or logistical challenges outside the operator's control? (e.g. a shipment held up by border inspection) be included in the definition of catastrophic circumstances?

Is the space requirement for cattle (6.8.8) the same for all breeds or can an adjustment be made for smaller animals such as Jerseys?

In 8.2 of the Standard, what does the term "constituent of an ingredient" mean?

A new comment period has been launched by the Standards Interpretation Committee. Visit [OFC website](#), Standards Interpretation on the menu, to consult the proposed answers to stakeholders' questions and learn more about the SIC activities.

... The [Organic Science Cluster](#) II's planning is well underway. Many industry partners are supporting the new projects planned by Canadian researchers. OACC is anxious to present the full application to AAFC, that should issue approvals early spring.

...The new National Organic Input Brand Name Directory will be launched soon. All organic input manufacturers are invited to contact Pepperdoft, at getlisted@organicinputs.ca to have their inputs added to the list. More info to come!

Cornstalks Everywhere But Nothing Else, Not Even A Bee

[*Cornstalks Everywhere But Nothing Else, Not Even A Bee*](#) is a paper about a science-writer who spent two nights and three days smack in the middle of a 600-acre farm in Grundy County. His plan was to settle in amongst the corn stalks (there are an "estimated three trillion" of them in Iowa) to see what's living there, other than corn. Cornfields, however, are not like national parks or virgin forests. Corn farmers champion corn. Anything that might eat corn, hurt corn, bother corn, is killed. Their corn is bred to fight pests. The ground is sprayed. The stalks are sprayed again. So, like David, Craig wondered, "What will I find?" He found almost nothing. "I listened and heard nothing, no bird, no click of insect."



There were no bees. The air, the ground, seemed vacant. He found one ant "so small you couldn't pin it to a specimen board." A little later, crawling to a different row, he found one mushroom, "the size of an apple seed." (A relative of the one pictured below.) Then, later, a cobweb spider eating a crane fly (only one). A single red mite "the size of a dust mote hurrying across the barren earth," some grasshoppers, and that's it. Though he crawled and crawled, he found nothing else. "It felt like another planet entirely," he said, a world denuded. Yet, 100 years ago, these same fields, these prairies, were home to 300 species of plants, 60 mammals, 300 birds, hundreds and hundreds of insects.

This soil was the richest, the loamiest in the state. And now, in these patches, there is almost literally nothing but one kind of living thing.

Low-Level-Presence of Non-approved GMOs

Soon on your food label: "Ingredients: a little quantity of non-approved GMOs in Canada"?

AAFC wants to facilitate import of food (grain) in Canada. So, in the event that dozens of new GMOs are developed and not simultaneously approved in all the trading countries, AAFC proposes to accept imported grain with low levels of non approved GMOs; the reasoning behind that policy is that it is not worthwhile interrupting trade when low levels of non approved GMOs are detected if they do not pose sufficient risk to public health. The OFC argues that:

- This good intention to facilitate trade and avoid disrupting the value chain has the contrary effect on the organic industry. The tolerance, even at low levels, of non-approved GMOs, will create a real problem for producers and consumers not attracted to GM food. AAFC argues that "Canadian organic farmers and food producers use a range of management practices to avoid the use of prohibited ingredients, including those which are genetically modified....that these management practices will continue to prevent the use of prohibited ingredients in these products." But we know that contamination of organic products by GMOs is a real threat and that the best practices are not always efficient. The AAFC argument does not reflect what is happening in the value chain.

- The AAFC claims that scientific data will be used to prove that non-approved GMOs pose no risk at all. Who is presenting those data and researches? The GMO industry? AAFC does not specify where those researches are coming from.
- The submitted policy is based on the principle of safety of Canadian food, but the very concept of keeping the food supply safe is constantly in tension with “making it easy” for the trade. What is safe, healthy or unhealthy does seem to vary depending on who is defining it. The biotechnology industry has its own definition, consumers have theirs. It could be a matter of perception, but everyone should be able to decide about what they eat.
- If the LLP policy was introduced, and that non-approved GMOs found in an imported shipment would be below the established thresholds, there would be no action taken. All would be accepted as is, and life would go on as this LLP would comply with regulations. AAFC does not propose any follow-up on why, how to prevent it, where it comes from. It will not be required to return to zero level presence. It will be a done deal. If the policy is ever implemented, AAFC should investigate how contamination happens and what steps should be taken to prevent further contamination, even when the detected non approved GMOs are below the tolerance threshold.
- The proposed policy seems to ignore the very complex reality that will be upon us with the coming multiplication of GMOs. Testing capacity and accuracy, sampling methods, monitoring: how can this be done in a competent manner with the coming “invasion” of GMOs, when you don't even know what you are looking for as is the case of GMOs that are not approved in Canada?
- Organic producers are bearing alone the cost of contamination as no level of tolerance is deemed acceptable in organic production. The biotechnology industry does not share the cost of preventing GM products from contaminating non-GMO food and, if contamination occurs, neither the cost for the loss of market incurred when an organic shipment is contaminated.
- In the proposed policy, the distinction between action and threshold levels is not clear. The AAFC assessment of consequences is not any clearer. Finally, values of threshold for each culture are still to be determined. Many principles are described, but again, it is a "good intention" statement, not concrete, which opens the door to pressure from the biotech industry to have comfortable levels for traders, hidden to consumers.

We ask for the most conservative measures to be applied: tracing GMOs at all levels, and requiring imported product to be free from non-approved GMO's. We ask AAFC to define more clearly how LLP of non-approved GMOs are introduced in the chain of operations and how to prevent all presence of GMOs. Why should Canadians be the Guinea pigs of the world if Canada is the first country to implement LLP policies? The organic sector is asking for a liability policy to compensate for the loss of market access when GMO contaminates organic products. We also ask AAFC to require the labeling of the presence of all GMOs in food products. Then the consumer could really decide.

APPENDIX

Organic Federation of Canada / Fédération Biologique du Canada

Annual General Meeting

February 22nd 2013

9:00 – 12:00 PT

Aberdeen Room, Prestige Hotel

4411 32nd Street

Vernon, BC V1T 9G8

Dial-in numbers: 866-613-5223 or 416-204-9354

Access Code: 9610448

1. Convene and introductions – Roll call of the delegates of the members and of the sector participants
2. Adoption of Agenda.
3. Appointment of referee for the minutes.
4. Adoption of minutes of AGM 2011-2012.
5. Report from the President.
6. OFC Members Reports – main challenges for provincial & territorial associations
7. AGM Panel - **Should certification be mandatory for all organic operators on local, regional and provincial markets?** Updates from various experts and national discussion.
8. Reports on Projects:
 - OFC General Management and Communication
 - Organic Science Cluster Report:
 - 4th and final year of OSC I
 - OSC II – new challenges
 - Standards Interpretation Committee Report
 - Organicinputs.ca – National Organic Input Brand Name Directory
 - Funding the maintenance and review of the Canadian Organic Standards
9. OFC Financial Report 2011-2012; appointment of the auditor.
10. Designation of directors (voting and ex-officio)
 - Terms ending February 2013: MB, BC, ON, YK, SK
 - Terms ending February 2012: QC, AB, NL, PEI, NS, NB, COTA (as per 2007 AGM minutes)
11. Domestic issues –Next AGM
12. Varia
13. Adjourn