

July 2013

**A day at the AGM of the Canadian Seed Trade Association
Best Management Practices are the proposed solutions
to prevent contamination of organic crops from GE crops,
but the organic sector remains skeptical**

OFC Coordinator, Nicole Boudreau, attended there CSTA Committee meetings July 16 in Quebec city. The first meeting she attended was held by the CSTA Forage and Turf Committee, where the coexistence plan developed by CSTA to promote peaceful coexistence of GM and organic and crops was presented to the audience. The basic principle of this plan is that “Farmers should be able to choose”. It is all about choice. But the plan is mainly based on best management practices (BMP) that are voluntary. It does not specify how these BMP will be monitored but CSTA comments that training, , booklet distribution, bilingual material should assure a good adoption rate from biotech farming industry.

[The plan](#) is about record keeping, preventing adventitious and Low Level Presence at planting, the reduction of the contamination risk from gene flow and preventing mixing at harvest and during handling and storage. It also aims at preventing volunteers from a prior GM crops and weed resistance.

“No one is happy with that plan” commented Ms Patti Townsend, the Executive Director of CSTA. But she is pretty confident that it will work.

But how can contamination be prevented when the coexistence plan is all about prevention and risk reduction, based on voluntary management practices?

Will the bees accept to comply with the plan and avoid disseminating the pollen from GM crops to the neighboring organic crop? It is easy to be sarcastic, but who will pay when contamination will occur? The plan remains silent about this. And it is a major error.

Some participants voiced concerns when the plan was presented: was it submitted to CSTA legal service? Who should be the “owner” of the plan: the biotech companies or CSTA? Nicole Boudreau expressed that the organic sector is not at all comfortable with the proposed plan and that discussions should be extended to prevent what could be disastrous for all farmers: spending time and money in legal battles instead of farming to feed the country.

CBAN [published a paper](#): *The Canadian Seed Trade Association’s so-called “Coexistence Plan” is a gateway to GM alfalfa contamination* on its website that all organic stakeholders should read. It describes thoroughly the weaknesses of the plan. And it confirms that GM alfalfa is a real threat to organic agriculture. If it is all about choices, how will organic and non GM farmers be able to maintain their chosen practices if contamination occurs?

Forage Genetics International (FGI) presented an [update on Roundup Ready Alfalfa](#) : FGI states that it has NOT made any decision about the future commercialization of RRA in Canada and that “Agronomic stewardship and stakeholder-approved coexistence plans must be in place before any commercialization decision for Eastern Canada”. They confirmed that 35% of alfalfa grown in the USA is Roundup Ready alfalfa (RRA) and that on a survey they made with over 200 alfalfa growers of Eastern Canada, 47% declared that they would likely try RRA if it was commercially available. When they did their survey, did they mention that the risk of contamination of organic and non GM crops from GM alfalfa was very high? If so, how would it have affected the 47% of growers that said that they would try RRA? No one knows.

FGI also said that they plan to have reduced-lignin alfalfa deregulated by Canada and USA. FGI did not comment on the efficiency of the coexistence plan; will BMPs help prevent contamination when two GM alfalfa varieties will be commercialized?

BMPs are also the solution promoted by CropLife Canada to protect the pollinators from potential toxic effect of neonicotinoids (neonics) on bees. At the meeting of the Corn, Soybeans and Eastern Cereal Committee, Pierre Petelle, CropLife VP Chemistry, stated that education and outreach, engagement of beekeeping community and good dialogue with PMRA will assure that the BMPs are well applied.

Croplife Canada even supports the “coexistence of insecticide-treated seeds and bees”.

“Bees and crop protection products are both vitally important to agricultural production. Bees pollinate many important crops and pesticides play a crucial role in protecting these crops from potentially devastating pest damage.” But when using pesticides to protect crops from pest insects, growers are potentially affecting bee health; after all, bees are insects. The EU has banned the “neonics”. But in Canada, we continue to promote coexistence and BMPs to protect pollinators. Will it be sufficient?

BMPs are also promoted to prevent weed resistance to glyphosate. Stephen Yarrow, from Croplife Canada, declared at the CSTA Biotechnology Committee that “we should be more aggressive in preventing development of resistance”, and rotation is one of the best management practice. Educating and persuading growers to rotate crops will prevent new resistant weeds.

Yarrow proudly detailed how GE crops are progressing around the planet, mostly in developing countries. He is delighted with the aggressive initiative of the Canadian government in promoting the Low Level Presence Policy (LLP) around the world. “It facilitates offering new choices” comments Yarrow, pleading that synchronous approval of new GE traits is difficult to accomplish. Croplife wants a global registry approach to prevent trade disruption.

When asked about contamination of organic and non GM crops, he had no answer, and then finally mentioned that the coexistence plan should resolve this issue.

About the BC municipalities that are banning GMOs

“It is a strange behavior that is all based on emotions, and Croplife is not concerned”.

Stephen Yarrow
VP, Plant Biotechnology, Croplife
Canada

An Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada representative, Kirsten Finstad, [finally presented](#) how AAFC is developing and promoting the LLP policy. She first stated that GM crops are “benefiting the environment because of the reduced tillage”. That is not easy to hear when you are an organic stakeholder. She explained that the LLP policy on food and feed is progressing very well; there was a Glocal LLP Initiative created in March 2012, involving 14 countries toward the development of international solutions to LLP. But she explained that seeds are different as it is intended to be released in the environment and persistent. AAFC will explore need for international environmental risk assessment (ERA) guidelines for LLP in seed, identify impacts on agri-food value chain, assess different proposals for LLP in seed, evaluate possible alignment with food/feed policy and, at last, evaluate Canada being «first adopter” for LLP in seed.

There were many other issues raised at the CSTA meetings where 208 participants were registered; amongst these, 70 are representatives of biotech companies (Monsanto, FGI, DuPont Pioneer, Syngenta, etc). Organic and non GE crop growers seemed absent or silent. The perceptions, ways of analyzing issues are completely different. We surely agree to disagree on best farming practices but the GM farmers seem rather annoyed to hear that some organic “folks” could slow their growth. They do not understand organics, one even confusing the [CGSB voluntary labelling standard](#) of non GE food with the organic standard. Another participant commented that organic producers are responsible to protect their crops so that GE farmers should not be restricted in their own practices. There is a huge lack of information and communication between the two sectors. That is not the best background for establishing efficient coexistence rules.

Two farmers have formally asked the Ontario government to carry out an environmental assessment of genetically modified (GM) alfalfa before the seed is sold in the province

They launched an application under Ontario’s Environmental Bill of Rights, the first ever request relating to the issue of GM crops.

[Read more here.](#)

COS Review

Review schedule adjusted - OFC Fundraising Campaign underway

- **The Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) and the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) will launch soon a press release to officially announce the review of the national standards referenced by Canadian regulations; the Canadian Organic Standards are one of these.**

- The COS review workplan will also be finalized soon. SCC was requiring a precise time schedule for the COS review process and very detailed budget lines. CGSB and SCC agree to extend the revision schedule to August 2015.

“The Memorandum of Understanding we (CGSB) have with Standards Council of Canada provides the funding for the full review for two years. The original intent was to start the project as soon as we signed the MOU in early April 2013. It has taken until now for us to get the work plan approved by SCC, and they would not allow us to start work on the standard until we had it approved. We negotiated with SCC and they agreed that the two year window to revise the standard could be extended to August 2015 from April 2015. I agree that there is a lot of work to be done in a fairly short time, but this is exceptional funding and an opportunity that should be taken advantage of to the full extent” comments Patricia Wait, manager at CGSB.

The organic sector is very satisfied with this extension. The SCC funding will cover cost incurred by CGSB (CGSB staff, translation services, logistical support, general monitoring of the revision). The organic sector must take responsibility for covering cost incurred for the coordination of the working groups, for research on complex issues, travel fees for voting members attending CGSB meetings, communication activities with the sector, etc.

- OFC application under AAFC Agri-Marketing program for funding the COS review has not been approved yet; AAFC officers are in regular contact with OFC and are assuring that AAFC should deliver an answer in September.
- OFC fundraising campaign to fund 25% of the cost of the review to match AAFC funding is progressing. If you have not been contacted yet and want to contribute to the campaign, do not hesitate to contact your [provincial organic association](#) or OFC. We will publish soon the first list of donors.
- Many stakeholders have submitted their names to participate to the working groups that will draft and propose amendments to the organic standard; the conveners of the working groups will meet next week to establish the membership of the WGs. They have to assure that each WG is balanced and composed of members with various expertise and background. Candidates can still submit their names at info@organicfederation.ca

To remain competitive and continue to grow,
the Canadian organic sector is reviewing the organic standard that governs
the daily work of Canadian certified operators.

The revision of the standard is led by the industry.

**Contribute to the fundraising campaign
of the Organic Federation of Canada
to support the review of the Canadian Organic Standards.**

Objectives: CAN/CGSB-32.310-2015,
CAN/CGSB-32.311-2015
and a regenerated and
expanding organic market



For more information,
Visit OFC website
www.organicfederation.ca
or contact OFC by email
info@organicfederation.ca
Or by phone – 514-488-6192



Black Family Farm Celebration August 4 2013

Congratulations to Larry Black, MOA representative on OFC Board

The implementation of the [Manitoba's Organic Products Regulations Act](#) and the celebration of 100 years of organic production on the Black Family farm are two great summer events in Manitoba!

The Black Family homestead @ NE2-2-22 is a Century Farm! The original 1/4 was purchased by Thomas Black in 1912 and first occupied in 1913.

This land has never been farmed with commercial sprays or fertilizers. So the family celebrates 100 years of Organic Production, and 4.5 generations of organic Black family farmers! Larry and Sue celebrate their 35th anniversary of marriage, and of ownership of the Black Family Farm @ NE 34-1-22. Last year, after many years of farming with them, their son, Dave and his wife Ashley joined them in full partnership. So, the family also celebrates the succession of their farm!

There will be 2 Century Farm presentations on Sunday, August 4th 1:30 pm@ NE 34-1-22, Lake Metigoshe Road – The Black Family Farm. Then, immediately following @ NE 2-2-22, the homestead ¼. A crop tour will follow the presentations.



An evening celebration will be held at the Metis Community Centre, Lake Metigoshe. Supper will be served at 6:30pm. The meal will be mostly local and organic food, including the family's pork and chicken, BBQd + served by Rural Routes (local food group). A bonfire and sing-along will follow supper. Please bring your instruments, singing voice, and lawn chairs. BYOB if desired. Campsites are being provided, on site, for Saturday and Sunday nights. Please don't drink and drive!

Due to their limitations, they are capping the meal at 250 people- the early bird gets the worm! Please RSVP by July 8 at 204 747 2867 or at lasue@mynetset.ca

Canadian Organic Inputs Directory



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