



InfoBio – The Canadian Organic Standards Review is underway

- First in-person meeting of the CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture in December
- Industry contributions will match AAFC funding of the project
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October 2013

First in-person meeting of the CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture to be held on December 11-13, 2013, in Gatineau, QC

The review of the Canadian Organic Standards is finally underway: The Working Groups (WGs) have been re-established and are meeting regularly to analyze the proposed amendments to the Canadian standard, which have been submitted by operators and stakeholders over the recent years. There are over 200 items on the Review work-list related to the General Principles and Management Standards (CAN/CGSB-32.310-2006), and over 150 items on the work-list related to the Permitted Substances Lists (CAN/CGSB-32.311-2006). The WGs' proposals for amendments will be submitted to the CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture, also called the Technical Committee (TC), which is composed of members who will vote on the proposed amendments.

CGSB is finalizing the re-establishment of the Technical Committee, to ensure that it is balanced and representative of the Canadian organic sector. The Working Group Conveners have selected Hugh Martin as the Interim Chair of the Technical Committee; Hugh will become the permanent Chair if his nomination is approved at the committee's first in-person meeting in December.

A full review is a long exercise: CGSB has proposed a 2-year calendar, including three 3-day meetings of the Technical Committee (to be held in December 2013, April 2014, and December 2014); a public comment period and ballot to vote on proposed amendments; and a 2-day meeting in March 2015 to resolve negative votes and/or comments. CGSB plans to publish the revised standards in August 2015, as per the directives of the Standards Council of Canada.

Mark Schuessler is the CGSB officer responsible for the monitoring and services provided by CGSB during the 2-year review period. Supported by AAFC's contribution and industry's financial participation, the OFC is supervising the work of the Working Group Conveners and of the Chair of the Technical Committee, and is responsible for communicating the review activities to the Canadian sector.

OFC's fundraising campaign to cover a portion of the review's cost will be more active in November on the West Coast, in the Prairies and in Ontario.

Visit [OFC website](#) to learn more about the review and to become an organic sponsor!

The Interim Chair of the Technical Committee

An Interview with Hugh Martin

Hugh Martin has worked with the organic sector for 30 years. For the past two years, Hugh has been an organic inspector on a diverse range of crop and livestock farms. Previously, Hugh worked with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food for 34 years, the last 15 of which he was the Organic Crop Production Program Lead, and developed extension information for organic farmers. He has been a member of the CGSB Technical Committee on Organic Agriculture since 1997. He was also a member of the Expert Committee on Organic Agriculture for 8 years. Hugh grew up on a mixed farm in South-Western Ontario.



You have been elected as the Interim Chair of the Technical Committee that will be responsible for the 2-year review of the Canadian Organic Standards. What is your main objective in accepting this position?

My primary goal is to complete the review of the standards in an efficient manner that maintains harmony in the organic sector.

What are the main challenges the Technical Committee, under your leadership, will have to face?

This is a team effort. Our main challenge is time. We have a very limited amount of time to complete the COS revisions with a very long list of work items. It is vital that we keep the Canadian organic standards up to date.

You have been involved for many years in the Canadian organic sector, and you are now an organic inspector. Why are you so involved in organic agriculture?

I find it rewarding. I have been involved in organic agriculture for 30 years and with the CGSB Technical Committee for Organic Agriculture for 15 years, as part my role with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Since my “retirement” 2 years ago, I have enjoyed visiting farms as an organic inspector. Early in my career I could see opportunities to bridge the gaps between organic and non-organic approaches to agriculture. Organic agriculture is an alternative method of production that deserves attention, in order to serve the consumers who demand organic food.

How easy is it to define and frame organic practices in a clear and applicable written standard?

It is very difficult. We have to make choices on what to include, and what is beyond our ability to enforce. It is a difficult challenge to word each sentence so that the intended meaning is clear, concise and will be uniformly interpreted by everyone. Unfortunately, we are not able to include each production practice for every farm product and food production process, as that would require a very long document. The committee members have to work together and come to a consensus to create standards we can apply across Canada, and that will be respected in the Canadian and international organic communities.

The Working Groups and their Conveners

Seven Working Groups have been established and are meeting regularly to prepare amendments to be discussed at the first meeting of the TC in Gatineau. The list of the Working Groups and of their respective Conveners is posted below. All have longstanding experience in standards interpretation and application, and have undertaken the task of reviewing the requests for amendments with enthusiasm. Each Working Group is composed of 5-10 members, who include operators, stakeholders, managers and even policy makers involved in organic production in Canada.



Jean Duval - 32.310 - Crop

Jean is an agronomist who has specialized in organic farming for over 20 years. After agronomic studies in soil science at McGill University, he spent 7 years coordinating a provincial information service on organic agriculture at the Project for Ecological Agriculture, a center founded by Stuart Macdonald on McGill's Hill campus. During those years he taught organic farming, conservation, and soil fertility at college and university levels. He then became an organic inspector, and was responsible for consulting services at the Club Bio-Action, an organization for which he worked until 2009, advising organic farms in field crops and horticulture. He has remained

involved in organic standards committees at the provincial and federal levels, and since 2011, has been working as project manager at the Centre of Expertise and Transfer in Organic and Local Farming at the CÉGEP in Victoriaville, QC.



Linda Edwards - 32.311 - PSL Crop

Linda is an industry leader in the production of organic fruit in BC and Canada. Through her company, Integrated Crop Management Inc., she has played a vital role in bringing integrated pest management to the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. She developed a biologically based control system for the devastating and insecticide-resistant insect pest, pear psylla, and is credited with having saved pear production from near-devastation in the Okanagan Valley. Her protocols continue to be used. Her book *Organic Tree Fruit Management* remains a valuable and widely adopted guide for organic orchardists. She also co-authored *Field guide to harmful and beneficial insects and mites of tree fruits* with Hugh Philips.

Linda has been a leader in the development of standards for organic fruit production and is president of the Pacific Agricultural Certification Society, and on the board of the Certified Organic Association of BC. Linda has always held a scientific approach to solving practical problems and continually experiments with new varieties, management practices, and marketing opportunities.



Anne Macey - 32.310- Livestock

Anne has been involved in the organic sector for 30 years in many different roles. She was the editor of first edition of COG's *Organic Livestock Handbook* and has contributed to other COG publications, including *A Guide to Understanding the Canadian Organic Standards*, and *Living with Worms in Organic Sheep Production*. She has operated a small, mixed organic farm in Ontario, worked as an organic inspector, and has recently retired as Director of the Accreditation Board of COABC and chair of the Accreditation Committee of the International Organic Accreditation Service. Anne is a member of the Animal Welfare Task Force and is currently volunteering her time to develop agricultural infrastructure on Salt Spring Island, including a community owned and operated abattoir.



Janine Gibson - 32.311- PSL Livestock

Currently a peer-elected member of the Standards Interpretation Committee of Canada, Janine provides organic industry guidance to the Canada Organic Office of the CFIA, and also helps farm families better understand our organic standards.

Janine has served on the Organic Technical Committee since 1999, first representing the International Organic Inspectors Association (Canadian Committee), and then the Manitoba chapter of Canadian Organic Growers – the Organic Food Council of MB. She has been an organic inspector of Crops, Livestock and Processing since 1993, conducted a comparative analysis of Conformity Verification Bodies for the CFIA in 2002, and is a past national president of Canadian Organic Growers.



Rochelle Eisen - 32.310 - Preparation/Processing

Rochelle has 26 years of experience in organic assurance, extension and consultation.

She collaborates with Dr. Brenda Frick and Gunta Vitins under the banner of [Resilient Solutions Consulting](#). She is active on the Standards Interpretation Committee, the Organic Value Chain Roundtable, and is the current president of the Canadian Organic Growers. She also sits on the board of the Penticton Farmers' Market and the Organic Farming Institute of British Columbia (OFIBC).



Roxanne Beavers - 32.311 - PSL Preparation/Processing

Roxanne has worked as an organic and fair trade inspector in Atlantic Canada, and now in Ontario. She earned her Masters degree in Agriculture as one of the first students at the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada. Since 2010, she has worked as an agrologist with the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) in a project helping farmers and processors in their transition to organic agriculture. For six years, she has served as ACORN's member on the Technical Committee for the Canadian Organic Standards, and recently joined the Standards Interpretation Committee.



Dag Falck - 32.311 - General PSL

Dag Falck has served as Organic Program Manager for Nature's Path Organic Foods since 2002. Prior to joining the company, he was an organic inspector for 15 years. Dag studied agronomy in Norway and moved to North America to work as an organic inspector. As an inspector in Western Canada and the United States, he inspected a variety of farm operations, from market gardens to large field crop ventures and complex organic processors, which helped develop his unique perspective of the organic sector.



Ted Zettel - Permanent PSL Committee

Ted Zettel was one of the first Canadian farmers to make the transition to organic farming, achieving certification in 1986. He helped found OntarBio Cooperative (now Organic Meadow) in 1989 and was the first President. He served as Public Relations Director for the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario from 1987 until 1992, and has been active in teaching and promoting organic methods and the ideal of cooperation to achieve the common good across Canada and internationally. Ted retired from organic dairy farming after 29 years, but still manages their 400 acres as an organic cash crop operation, together with his wife and business partner Christine, and their son Mark. He is currently the Chair of the Standards Interpretation Committee, and the Organic Council of Ontario's delegate to the Organic Federation of Canada; he was elected President of the OFC in 2008.

The launch of the Permanent PSL Committee An Interview with Ted Zettel

You are the current Chair of the Standards Interpretation Committee (SIC) and you are also involved, as OFC president and as the Convener of the Permanent PSL Committee, in the COS Review project. What is the difference between the standard interpretation and the standard review? Are they related?

The role of the SIC is to advise the Canadian Organic Office on interpretation of the Standard, but the SIC cannot change the Standard or advise in a way that goes against the meaning of what is currently written. The Standard is quite complex, and often the decision on which practices are compliant with the Standard can involve several different sections.

Most of the questions that come to the SIC arise out of conflicting decisions made by various Certifying Bodies (CBs); it is understandable that there will be discrepancies in the conclusions drawn by CBs when evaluating operations. These are the cases referred to the Standards Interpretation Committee, which represents the sector and ensures that the enforcement of the regulation is in line with the intent of the organic community that devised the Standard in the first place. Standards Review and Revision, which takes place within the policy guidelines of the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB), is a much more cumbersome, costly and time-consuming process, but it is the only way the Standards can be changed. Why would the Standards need to be changed? There are several reasons;

- 1) The meaning of a certain section is vague and the wording open to several valid but conflicting interpretations. The intent of the paragraph needs to be clarified and the language changed to spell out what is intended.
- 2) One paragraph and another seem to conflict and lead to different conclusions.
- 3) The industry has evolved. Something that was originally included in the standard is no longer relevant, or something has emerged that was not envisioned earlier but now needs to be regulated.
- 4) The requirement for compliance is grossly inconsistent with what is required in the USA or EU, creating an unfair competitive environment.

What do you see as the main challenge related to the COS Review?

Due to a lack of funding, the Standard has been unchanged for almost 4 years. During that time, the SIC has written over 200 interpretations and tagged 50 Items for review and potential revision. The workload now before the CGSB Organic Technical Committee is massive, and the funding is squeezed into less than two years. We will not accomplish all that we hope to with this round of revision, but will take our best shot at getting the most significant and urgent matters dealt with. What is more troubling on the longer-term horizon is that there is still no permanent funding mechanism to carry on the work of Standards Maintenance in the future.

As the Convener of the Working Group responsible for establishing a Permanent PSL Committee, can you explain what the role of this specific committee will be?

The Permitted Substances List (32.311) is presently part of the Standard, so like the production Standard (32.310), it cannot be changed without activating the CGSB process. This is a problem, since the list is very arbitrary and leaves no room for the regulator to exercise discretion. For example, processors of organic products in the U.S.A. may be allowed to use a particular substance as a processing aid, and everyone here may agree that it belongs on the PSL in Canada, but this addition cannot be made until the CGSB convenes. This places us at a disadvantage. Within the policy guidelines of the CGSB there is room to redefine the PSL as an addendum to the Standard, and give the sector the opportunity to change it more easily. Obviously, this is a heavy responsibility, and we need to closely examine the terms of reference and constitution for a new "Permanent PSL Committee." This is the task of the Working Group that I will be leading – we will bring recommendations to the Technical Committee.

The Canadian organic sector has finally received financial support from AAFC to organize and fund the work of the Working Groups and the Technical Committee. Are you satisfied with the financial sustainability of the sector?

We have been told in very clear terms not to expect further government assistance for work on Standards after this round of revision is complete. The organic community will, in the long term, have to pay for the maintenance of the Standard. There is, at the present time, no mechanism to collect money from organic operators to comprehensively support the sector's involvement with regulation. The Organic Federation of Canada has spent a lot of time on this vital issue. As operators, we need to each contribute a small amount of money so that we are organized and can speak to government effectively, and so that we are able to look out for the interests of our community as other more mature sectors do. OFC is in discussion with our provincial associations, with the Canadian Organic Office and with the major CB's to investigate the option of a surcharge on certification. Personally, while I would have liked to see someone else pay, I see great value in funding the

upkeep of the Standard ourselves and retaining control of the process. Certified organic operators (the bulk of whom are farmers), are the only ones who can ensure the integrity of the organic claim.

Please have a look at the sponsors that have already contributed to the COS review! Their business contacts and their activities [are listed here](#). These sponsors are part of the Canadian organic economy, and OFC and the whole sector thank them all!

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