

Notes from “**Going (and staying) organic-what you need to know about standards, recordkeeping and inspection**” with Allison Grant and Roxanne Beavers. 3pm, Thursday, Saint John room.

- Talking about organic product standards, determining what is the Canadian organic standard, and how to get certified.
 - Organic products regulations came into effect June 30, 2009, making the Canadian organic standards mandatory.
 - 1999 voluntary Canadian organic standard produced via Canadian general standards board.
 - The whole organic process was driven by organic sector, it was consensus decision making
 - The current standard was last amended in 2009
 - It is a living document, kept up to date. Any changes made, the onus is on farmer to keep up to date with them. Farmers have 12 months to implement an amendment so they must check website regularly. An organic inspector may tell farmer, then they have one year to implement the new changes and will be inspected again. Canadian organic standard is available online.

General principles and what the network is aiming for:

- Environmental preservation; building soil fertility; biological diversity; recycling matter within the enterprise; care for livestock; maintaining integrity and vital qualities; rely on renewable resources in locally organized agricultural systems.
- The organic principles not mandatory, but informative. Standard outlines practical ways to reach those principles.
- Prohibitions to organic farming: genetic engineering, pesticides and wood preservatives (except those in psf), fertilizer or compost (those containing any prohibited compounds), sewage sludge, synthetic growth regulators and synthetic veterinary drugs. Synthetic processing substances, aids and ingredients, food additives, ionizing radiation on food or inputs, equipment or containers treated or pesticides or fungicides (e.g. banana boxes always treated with pesticides), cloned animals or nanotechnology (microbiotic inhibitors in metals, scarier than GMO's).

Sections of the standard:

- scope, definitions, organic plan
- specific requirements (crop, livestock, maple, honey, sprouts, greenhouse, wild crops)
- preparation and handling of organic products.

Permitted substances list:

- Identifies things that can be used on a general level, not for specific brands. Definition of organic by organic board not the same definition as used by fertilizer industry. Need to check first, may not be certified by organic board even if fertilizer company says it is organic. Check with your organic certifying body.
- Canadian standard not the same as the American section.

Certification process for organic farming:

Apply to a certification body. You will get reviewed by the board and are inspected that year. The inspectors report will be reviewed. Then the farm is issued a certificate.

When first starting out, the farm has to go through a transition period. It takes 3yrs of transition from conventional before you can be considered organic (e.g. after using a prohibited substance). Must apply to CB (certification body) 15 months before you plan to market your products as organic. There is pre-certification, one must go through 2 inspections. Livestock transition varies. chickens - must be treated organically from their second day of life.

Several questions asked during transition and certification procedure section of talk. Where people seemed interested in talk:

- Changes made to the regulation, i.e. the 15 month period required before you can market organic products was recently changed from 12 months and is just coming into effect.
 - In Canada, some antibiotics use allowed, but not in the USA. Some other differences b/t the two systems: Hydroponics allowed in US, not in Canada. Are working on an equivalency agreement b/t US and EU in Canada.
 - Most farmers at this talk are not exporters.
- Six certifiers in N.B., accredited under OPR (organic product regulations). Considerations for the farmer: structure of organization, cost, location, expertise, communication, markets. e.g. apiculture needs a certifying board that knows bees and the regulations for them.

- **Record keeping** is a big part of certification component. Whatever you say you're going to do to follow the standards **must be recorded**.

- Maintain records for five years
- Demonstrate that the organic plan is being followed
- Enable traceability of your products
- Records should be useful for both your operation and for the certification process

- Some records submitted to the CB and others are reviewed during inspection.

The farm must have an organic plan

- Describing your management system. Methods used on farm, include transition, preparation, handling of product and management practices. The document does not have to be large, just a summary (10 pages large)

- The organic plan is part of the application process.

e.g. compost/manure usage, weed, pest and disease management plan, soil conservation and water usage, inputs into soil, equipment used, post harvest handling, crop storage, transportation, animal management and health, parasite management plan (some limited parasiticide use allowed with livestock), record-keeping systems.

- When inspector comes, they will need to see some changes.

Part of the organic definition refers to the *traceability* of products. Organic philosophy was way ahead of the curve in terms of tracking food from field to fork.

One must be able to prove that the amount of product produced = product sold.

- This is to make sure you are not buying neighbour's non-organic produce and selling it as organic. Harder to police in very mixed farm.

- They want to see an area planted log, field activity log, harvest records, purchase and inventory record, sales records. It's a math exercise, with the purpose to make sure everyone is on the level.

Question: "How do you deal with losses?"

Most inspectors should have a grasp on what can be expected in a given year for yield. Low yields don't really raise alarm bells for the certification board, but they want to know if batches are ruined - for tracing production methods/efficiency. Though it's more important for the farmer so they don't lose money, but OPR doesn't really care.

A lot of organic farming is dependent on good faith, but you do have an annual inspection from the certifying body.

Question: re: lot number on product

This would allow traceability back to where in field product grown. most mixed farms don't have them (too small to be necessary). market gardeners use harvest date in lieu of lot number. They can also show inspectors garden plan.

Inspectors are usually independent contractors. It's their job to compare what they see and what you're doing with standards. They are the eyes and ears of certification body. They take a walk around the farm, see all things relating to

farm practice including records and report back to CB, who will make the decision. The inspector doesn't make the decision, and it can be appealed.

"Staying organic" tips

- Make sure you are ready when you make the transition.
- Charge enough to get your organic premium, market your organic advantage, at least enough to get back what you spend to become organic. most people will understand.
- Set up your records well in the first few years, as this will save time later on. you'll do it right the second time! Make sure you have all the ducks in a row. Being excel (the Microsoft spreadsheet application) savvy really helps, though some people still use scribblers. Try to be excessive with record keeping in the first few years- better to over record than not - you'll learn by experience what is essential to keep track of. If you don't, you may be setting yourself up for frustration down the road.
- Continuous learning about organic production and management. Keep up to date with the system, as there's always new ways of growing and adapting.
- Ultimate system of assurance - third party certification. Gives end user assurance. Organic is the high road in agriculture. Is also a good marketing tool.
- If interested in becoming organic, you can contact a certifying body, or check the Organic Path on the ACORN website. You can also contact roxannebeavers@yahoo.com for assistance from ACORN.

Questions for certifiers:

- "Do you do road-trips?"
Yes, at times. We sometimes do Kitchen meetings – to meet several people at the same time.
- "For whatever you buy, must you keep packaging, receipts?"
Yes, keep packaging. If no receipt, keep photocopy of receipt. each person sharing product needs to have copy of packaging, receipts
- "Which province has subsidies for organic?"
 - N.B. and PEI. NS does not.

-Onus is on farmer to create buffer zone around their farm to keep away pesticide drift, etc. you need to alert your neighbours that you're organic. buffer zone must be minimum 8m. CB (certifying body) can extend the buffer zone if they feel necessary. A good buffer zone is your best friend. A wind row is good too. CB and inspectors have right to ask for pesticide testing. This happens in the Prairies more than in the Maritimes.

- “How and when can you use the Canada organic logo?”
- OPR says if you’re certified to their standards, then you as a producer are allowed to use that logo on your label. If you want to use it for a sign or advertising (e.g. brochure, website), you need special permission to use it in a promotional way.
- “Can I use conventional manure on my organic farm?”
- Yes, but there are issues if you choose to do so. It must be applied 90 days before if it’s off ground (for grain crops), 120 days for on the ground crops (e.g. squash) before harvest. Non-organic manure generally has GMO feed given to the animal, CB’s can ask for the manure to be composted -composting will denature modified DNA (heat does this) faster than putting manure straight to ground. It is still a question in the standard that people are asking. Standard is interpretable - your preference should be something else than conventional manure. Manure from animals that are fed GMO’s is more than one step removed, so not such a big issue. If you do use manure from animals raised conventionally, you have to demonstrate that you **can’t** get non GMO manure. Most people who can are keeping their own manure. Letter of the law does not prohibit it, but CB may make you compost it first. There’s lots of debate about this. Manure can never come from animals that are kept in the dark and or in a cage where they can’t turn around.