Welcome to the Maritime Organic Grains Network (MOGN)

It all started when Andy Hammermeister at the Organic Agriculture Center of Canada (OACC), who is originally from the grain belt of Western Canada, realized that there was a great need for local organic farmers to share and access information on organic grain production. The idea received dozens of signatures from interested farmers and letters of support from processors, so we knew the idea was one worth pursuing.

In July 2007 the ACAAF councils of NB, NS and PEI approved a proposal submitted by the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) to create the network and fund it for three years. ACORN, as the organic industry voice in Atlantic Canada, and OACC are working together to make this network a success. To coordinate the project, Mark Bernard, an organic producer in PEI, has been hired to coordinate this.

It is our goal that MOGN will bring the Maritimes just a little closer together to let grain, cereal, and oilseed farmers know what is in demand and what is being grown. It will also provide information on growing seed, quality standards, market opportunities, and varieties information. We'll be doing this through the newsletter, workshops, research, on-farm research and field tours. MOGN will help link the farmer and end user, ultimately increasing production and consumption of local organics.

To achieve this, MOGN is asking all producers, processors and grain consumers to be supportive in sharing information.

We are currently developing an inventory of the amount of organic grain grown in the Maritimes. A short crop information survey is included with this newsletter. Please fill out this form and returning it to us.

This information will then be used to gauge the amount grain currently grown in the region and we'll report the combined results—no data will be released from individual farms. It will then be available for processors and grain users.

We hope you find this newsletter of value and would welcome any ideas for content and demonstration projects. You can send suggestions to Mark Bernard (902)439-1182 (cell), (902)887-3188 (home), or email mbernard@nsac.ca.

Note: To up-date your contact information or be removed from the mailing list, please contact ACORN at 1-866-322-2676 or email admin@acornorganic.org.

Mark your Calendars –
Organic Grain and Oileseed Forum

On March 5-6, 2008, ACORN will be hosting a program dedicated to organic grain and oilseed transition, production, marketing, and information sharing.

In addition to expert speakers and research, there will be first-hand accounts from farmers and processors. The trade show will also be open, with exhibitors representing the whole organic industry.

The Forum will kick-off the annual ACORN Conference, that takes place March 6-8, 2008.

This will all take place at the Memramcook Resort, NB, which is between Sackville and Moncton. Room rates range from $25-$79/night. Space is limited, so book early by calling 1-866-322-2676.

The full program and registration will be mailed in the next newsletter issue or available on-line at www.acornorganic.org

Interested in exhibiting? Contact ACORN at 1-866-322-2676 or email us at admin@acornorganic.org
By Mark Bernard

Eighteen people from the three Maritime Provinces, including farmers, processors, extension specialists and researchers, participated in a three-day trip that took us as far as Trois Rivieres, QC. The purpose of the trip was to visit organic grain and oilseed producers to get us thinking about how we in the Maritimes could increase and improve our own production and market.

In total we visited five farms, a pedigreed seed grower, flour mill, organic retail store owned by a farmer, and the Quebec Organic Cereal Trials. At each stop we took away a new understanding of organic farming. There were several commonalities across the farms:

1. All farms had established crop rotations and could quickly explain the logic behind the rotation.
2. All farmers used fresh manure, keeping in mind that fresh manure must be applied at least 90 days prior to harvest of crops grown above ground.
3. All farmers were growing or experimenting with high value cash crops; these crops were accompanied by higher risk.
4. Most farms had their own drying or heated aeration system.

We met our first farmer, Daniel Dubé, for dinner in St Jean Port-Joli before the tour of his farm. Daniel’s crops include soybeans, flax, mixed crops, hemp, and spring and winter wheat. Daniel likes under-seeding wheat with crimson clover using a broadcast spreader on the front of his tractor while doing his final post-emergent pass with the finger-weeder. “This approach to clover will winter kill and produce a clean seedbed the next year”. Daniel is experimenting with growing hemp, which is a medium-heavy

concerned the crop would ripen in less than 90 days.

**Hemp quick facts:** a permit is required to grow it. It’s seeded at 75 lbs/ac, seed costs were close to $190/ac, and it yielded 0.4-0.5 T/ac. A very good cutting bar is needed for harvest, and a conventional combine worked better than a rotary where wrapping was an issue.

Daniel is also experimenting with a crop roller similar to the Rodale Institute’s roller, where fall rye is rolled in the spring and soybeans are not tilled into the fall rye mulch. His experiments included the timing of rolling and rolling both before and after planting soybeans, as well as the row width of the beans. The group noticed quite a bit of volunteer growth of the rye.

Daniel’s main tillage equipment is owned by a machinery syndicate, which was formed by a number of producers who are in close proximity to each other. The farmers paid for 20% of the cost of the equipment upfront and the government covered the remainder. Farmer users then pay a rate based on their usage amount. For example, the combine has eight users, and the longest wait time has been 48 hours.

We next visited Ferme Champy owned by Christian Champigny, a former dairy farmer who now grows crops in a 9-year rotation on 180 acres; three years forage, one year sunflowers, corn, soybean, corn, soybean, then grain undersowned back to forage. The sunflower, corn and soybean are planted at a 30-inch row spacing.

Christian has developed a ‘weed whipper’ that is mounted to the front of the tractor for trimming the tops of weeds (mainly in soybean) while he is doing the final cultivation of his row crops. His row crop cultivation after planting includes: pre-emergent finger-weeding, post-emergent rotary hoe (twice), and two cultivations.

Although he sold the dairy section of his farm, Christian still relies on it for manure and as a market for his forages. Solid manure is applied to corn and sunflowers, and liquid manure is applied to the forage. The sunflowers are pressed and sold as oil and in cooperation with another farmer and the remaining crops are sold to organic dairy farms in Maine.

The 13,000 litres of oil produced from 28-hectares of sunflowers accounts for 50% of the farm’s income. Christian also holds an annual sunflower festival for which he charges admission. Christian also owns an organic health food store in town, which we visited and filled up on homemade waffles and chocolates.

Next we met Christian Forget from Grains Santé (Healthy Grains), who discussed their program of delivering grains to export markets. Grains Santé certification permits use of fertilizers but no pesticides.

Currently, there are 164 producers involved, and over 8000 hectares made up of soybeans, wheat and corn. The fields must be registered and inspected seven times throughout the season, and also inspected prior to harvest and again in storage. Traceability is very important for Grains Santé.

The cost of this program is $5.00/ha for the seal of approval, plus $30/ha for
inspection. Buyers of the grains and soybean specify the varieties they want grown.

We then traveled on to Pierre Labonte’s farm, who is also a former dairy, hog producer and very excited about his market for organic crops. “Buyers call me, rather than me calling buyers”.

Pierre has a three-year rotation: mixed grain underseeded to clover, corn and soybean. Pierre was using a system of ridge tillage for his corn and soybean, which reduced the amount of tillage in the spring for the soybean: Corn was planted in 30” rows, pre-emergent rotary hoe, post-emergent rotary hoe, cultivator with 25” sweeps (camera guided), two passes with the cultivator with hiller to create ridges, annual rye seeded on and between the rows in fall; spring soybean planting with sweeps that knock the annual rye off the top of the ridge, rotary hoe pre- & post-emergent, and four passes with cultivator with guidance system.

He noted that the reduction in disturbance in the spring before soybean planting helped to reduce weed seed germination, improve soil warming, and avoid saturation of the soybean seedbed. Pierre also had a well-designed grain drying, cleaning and storage system for his crops.

Our fourth stop of the day was at Ferme Fleuralic, near Baie du Févre. Louis Florent milks 35 certified organic dairy cows and is one of 10 shareholders in a cheese plant that processes certified milk. Louis had a very well-designed cropping system, including five years of forages, followed by manure & lime application prior to planting of spelt or an oat cover crop in the fall, then spelt or corn, followed by a mixed crop underseeded to forages.

Louis is also very intensive about his weed management. After discing his forages after his first cut of hay in the 5th year, he cultivates up to six times in August of the same year to control couch grass. Aside from the use of forages and timely tillage, he will hire in 4-5 workers to pull weeds out of 10-15 acres of corn each year.

Louis selects corn seed that is 100 CHU under conventional recommendations for his area. He finds that the crop is more vigorous in the spring and gives him an earlier corn crop that is not as tricky to harvest. Louis stated that soil pH, drainage, and land leveling were critical aspects of management on his farm.

Our last farm of the day was at Ferme Rheintal with Sebastien Angers, who recently started farming with his wife on his father-in-law’s farm. In addition to raising cattle, they have 20 sows (planning to expand to 50, with 1000 pigs to market each year) that are pastured. They prefer raising pork because it only takes six months to get the pork to market as opposed to two years for pasture beef. The pigs are kept indoors until weaning, pastured for at least two months, and then are brought in for finishing.

They have a seven-year crop rotation with four years of forages followed by corn, soy, grain, in a system similar to Louis’ described above. They plan to start focusing more on corn and soybean to increase energy in the feed for their pigs.

Our last day began with a pedigree seed grower, Sémences RDR Proulx. David Proulx gave us the tour of their grain handling facility and organic crops. They will be fully certified organic in 2008 with 900 acres of land, growing corn, barley, wheat, hulless oats, spelt and soybeans. He is also using the ridge till system for his corn and soybean years.

David noted that germination rates typically drop by 25% if the seed is stored an extra year...

(continued on next page 4)
For organic seed production, David stressed careful selection of equipment to permit easy cleaning between crops, and to allow optimum weed control. Fields need to be rogued to ensure that problem weeds are controlled (especially those that cannot be cleaned from the crop). Corn is a prominent cash crop for them.

His organic rotation consists of corn-soy-cereal-soy, which is higher value and reduces fertilizer (manure) requirements. Similar to some of the other farmers, David swaths his crop to allow drying (of grain and weeds) and cleaner threshing. David uses a brillion packer to prepare a uniform seedbed prior to planting, and emphasizes the importance of using the stale seedbed technique to control weeds.

Our last stop was at Aliments Trigone in St. Francois de Montmagny. We met Jacques Coté and Francine Pommerleau who operate a flour mill, processing wheat, hemp, buckwheat, spelt and kumut. Francine is also responsible for the field production of organic garlic.

We were particularly fortunate, as visitors are normally not allowed inside the mill. In the mill, gluten free crops are kept in completely separate areas so there is no chance for cross-contamination. The mill is also able to de-hull buckwheat providing a by-product (the hull), which is sometimes used for pillows. Jacques indicated that his customers had distinct varietal preferences for wheat. Buck-wheat should be swathed at least three weeks prior to harvest to allow proper seed maturation (weathering of the seed in the swath is not an issue with buckwheat). They expected to be processing in excess of 1,000,000 lbs of hemp in 2007, 1/3 of which was grown in Quebec.

All of the participants were very pleased to have been part of the tour and glad they made the time to go. Participants agreed that all the farmers seemed to know right off what their crop rotation is, whereas many of us in the Maritimes are still establishing that vital part of our operations and find it varying from year to year.

We also noted that most of the farmers are still experimenting after 15-20 years experience, continually seeking new opportunities to increase revenues, reduce costs, and improve their management practices.


A very big thank you goes out to Claude Berthélémé for organizing the farms, and keeping us all on schedule. Hats off to Claude and Daniel Savoie for doing a great job of translating for the group!

Getting Connected

Know someone who would be interested in receiving this newsletter or finding out about the MOGN?

Tell them about this project or send us their name and we’ll mail them a copy of the newsletter.

This network is open to anyone and the newsletter is free to receive.

Just contact ACORN at 1-866-322-2676 or email www.acornorganic.org

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Innovative Equipment

25" sweeps with a 5" spacing between (i.e. 30 inch rows planted). Discs can be dropped during the seedling stages to prevent soil from being thrown onto the seedlings. Later, the discs are lifted to allow soil to be thrown to the base of the plant to smother weeds.
Marketing Grain 101
By Mark Bernard

The marketing of organic grain is very different than conventional grain, in that most of the time organic grain has a guaranteed market before it’s harvested and sometimes even before it’s planted! Price may likely be the biggest issue raised when I am talking to a farmer. Organic grains or produce have always brought a premium over conventional products. The question still remains of how much of a premium and what is the end price. There are quite a few factors that will influence the price of the grain that is for sale.

First, there is no way you will be able to survive if you sell grain under your cost of production. This means you need to know your cost of production. For every farm cost of production will vary and most of the cost of production information released on the internet is developed as benchmarks or guides for you to base your farm on. Being aware of all costs involved (including labour) will provide the farmer with the most accurate basis from which to set prices.

Second, you can impact the purchase price with quality and strategic marketing. You must be able to convince the buyer that your product is worth the higher price. The quality of the grain will influence this, depending on the intended market. This may include having the grain cleaned to a certain grade or having a protein test completed on samples.

Volume is also a big factor in setting price. Having storage capacity provides an opportunity to hold the grain for premium market prices. Proper storage and handling of the grain will also improve relationships with potential buyers, as they will be under less pressure for taking the grain when they are not ready.

Proper drying and cleaning of the grain is essential to capture premiums and maintain your status as a preferred source among buyers. However, there are costs associated with the additional drying, cleaning and storage of grain that must be accounted for in setting the price.

Next, know your buyer. Most buyers will want to buy at a low price while the seller is awaiting the high price. Develop a relationship with your buyer early; understand the desired grain quality and work toward achieving that. Invite the buyer, if possible, to the field to see the crop growing. Find out if the buyer has varietal preferences of or preferred characteristics for the grain (or oilseed). Asking the right questions will help you grow the product that buyers want.

Depending on the buyer, some of the by-products (manure, for example) may be able to come back to your farm. Also, be aware of the amount of grain that is grown by other farmers in your area destined for the same market but may be in too small of quantity to ship affordably. Combining shipments has the potential of saving the buyer or seller(s) some additional costs.

Plan early for the growing season (including for fall crops). Talk with potential buyers and other farmers about what types of crops you will be able to grow in your rotation. Flour mills or feed mills will require consistent supply and need to plan well in advance. Find out what they are interested in and let them know your intentions, allowing them to plan better production.

Price is only one of the many components of marketing organic grains but is usually the first thing talked about. It is important to have a well-rounded approach to selling your grains starting with producing the best quality product possible.

I’ve seen examples of grain marketing cooperatives that are very transparent about how they set their price. They calculate and reveal their cost of production (including capital depreciation and labour) and then add on a reasonable return as income for the farms. If your product and supply is strong enough, many buyers will want to keep you as a supplier and will be willing to pay the price that has been set in a systematic way (i.e. not just pulling a number out of the hat).

One project of the Maritime Organic Grains Network is to create an inventory of the Maritime organic grain acreage. This inventory will create the ability for all farmers and processors in the region to plan for years in advance. Please help us provide accurate information of the organic grains to allow for further growth of the livestock and grain processing sectors by filling out and returning the attached form. Our goal is to have the list published by the end of October.
Buyers & Sellers Guide

Lackawanna Products Corp, Clarence, NY, USA. Interested in buying certified organic corn, soybean, wheat, barley and rye (min one truckload). Call Felician Masumbuko (716) 633-1940 ext 373.

Wanted: Organic spelt 2007 crop. $ based on Protein Levels: 12% + protein $450/MT; 11-11.9% protein $400/MT; low protein spelt $350/MT; *All prices offered are delivery to Natural Harvest Seed Cleaners Inc., Shomberg, ON. Contact Alec Mills, 905-953-6960

Barnyard Organics Ltd, Freetown PEI. Custom roasting organic soybeans and cleaning of organic grains. Also selling organic oats, mixed oats, peas, barley, spelt and soybeans. Email: info@barnyardorganics.ca or call Mark at (902) 439-1182.

Drew Jeffery, Pownall PEI, Certified Organic Barley, Call (902) 394-1522.

1.4 tonne of Common Garry Oats Certified MCOG Call Jim Newson (902) 621-0444.

Organic feed grade oats and straw certified by EcoCert. Contact SeaSpray Atlantic Coop at 902-798-7997 or seasprayatlantic@hotmail.com.

Vanco Farms Pownall PEI, 50 tonne Certified Organic Fall Rye, Call (902) 628-7033.

To post a FREE classified ad contact: Mark Bernard (902) 439-1182 or (902) 887-3188 or email mbernard@nsac.ca. You can also call ACORN toll-free at 1-866-322-2676

Call for Letters of Intent

The Maritime Organic Grains Network is interested in contracting with an individual or business to conduct an industry review. MOGN would like to further identify market opportunities for organic grains, cereals, and oilseeds in the Maritimes. This report would then be presented at the Organic Grains and Oilseed Forum, March 6, 2008. Budget for the project is not to exceed $5,000.

If interested, please submit your name, statement of interest, proposed budget, and brief curriculum vitae to ACORN at admin@acornorganic.org by October 19. Please forward this notice to any one who may be interested/qualified.

The Maritime Organic Grains Network acknowledges the generosity of its funders:

New Brunswick Agricultural Council

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network

Canada

Nova Scotia's ACAAF Council

CABC OACC

Prince Edward Island AD APT Council

Argi-Futures

Linking Organic Knowledge

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

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