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Welcome to “ON Organic”

Hugh Martin, Organic Crop Production Program Lead, OMAFRA

December is the month when winter comes whether we are ready or not. Take time to relax, enjoy the family, some celebration, and some reflection on the past year and how to make next year a better year. Be prepared to attend meetings and courses and to read as you continue your journey for learning. Thanks for your support this year for this newsletter. I hope you enjoy it.

Thanks to Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) for forwarding this on to their email lists, and I encourage you to Share it with other colleagues who may find it useful. As always I welcome your comments by email or when we see each other at various meetings this winter.

Subscription to this newsletter is easy and no cost, for details go to the webpage: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/subscribe/index.html#organic>

The newsletter is also posted on the OMAFRA website at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

The French version of these newsletters is available at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/french/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

The OMAFRA Organic pages are linked from: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html>

Season's Greetings to All

The ON Organic Team

Hugh Martin – editor, OMAFRA, Organic Crop Production Program Lead
Jack Kyle – OMAFRA, Grazier Specialist
Dorene Collins – OMAFRA, Customer Service and Marketing Program Lead
Helen Prinold – OMAFRA, Client Account Officer (your link to the organic food industry)
Hugh Berges – OMAFRA, Manager Horticultural Technology
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Community Supported Agriculture – A Unique Business Model

By: Dorene Collins, Marketing and Customer Service Program Lead, OMAFRA

Direct marketing of locally grown or raised farm products is proving to be an excellent way for 'new' farmers to enter the business of farming. In late November, I attended the Great Lakes Community Supported Agriculture Conference in Orillia. This was the first time this type of conference has been held in Ontario. The Community Supported Agriculture or CSA model is a growing phenomenon given the interest by urban consumers in the local food movement.

Many new or soon to be farmers that I met at the conference had not grown up on a farm and were energetic and eager about obtaining farm land, often just 3 acres or less to begin a CSA program. They are passionate about environmentally sustainable agriculture, supporting their local community and growing food that directly connects them to the consumer.

CSA's are part of the Small Farm Movement that is growing across Europe and North America. Those that do not wish to or have the opportunity to engage in large scale agriculture production are seeking out opportunities on small acreages. They mainly fall into three categories, new/young farmers; lifestyle farmers; and second career farmers. All these folks have different needs and expectations from a farm business perspective.

Those who did not grow up on farms gain practical farm experience through such programs as *CRAFT Ontario (The Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training in Ontario)*; *Farm Start*; *FarmLINK Ontario*; *Future Farmers Internship program*; *Farmers' Growing Farmers*; and *Incubator Farms* across Ontario and North America.

Many come to farming with very few capital resources including land, buildings, equipment etc. Some have set up unique arrangement with existing farmers to farm just a few acres on the farm which often includes the use of buildings and equipment. They start off experimenting with crops suitable for the soil type and local market. Initially, many sell at local farmers' markets to test out what products the consumer is looking for, followed by building clientele and launching into a CSA.

The CSA model most commonly involves fresh fruits and vegetables. Shares are sold to consumers at the beginning of the year and containers of fresh food are delivered weekly

during the growing season depending on yield and variety. CSA farmers consider the relationship they have with their customers the most important part of their business model. There is a great deal of trust on the part of both the farmer and customer. If it is a 'bad' year e.g. too dry or too wet, both the farmer and the customer share the results of the harvest. Many CSA farmers have monthly newsletters or email correspondence with their customers informing them of what crops they intend to plant, how the crops are progressing, pick-up and payment arrangements, etc. CSA farmers' report that their clients are very loyal and feel connected to a farm operation even though they often live in an urban area.

I came away from the conference very encouraged about a new crop of farmers emerging in the province through small farm agricultural practices. From a farm business perspective the lesson learned was the importance of marketing and customer loyalty in this type of farm model. Direct marketing comes with many challenges and opportunities, however CSA farmers are committed to facing the challenges and providing urban consumers with access to fresh farm products.

Final Results of the First Canadian Organic Farmer Survey of Research Needs

This survey was conducted by the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada last spring with organic farmers across Canada. Here is the Executive Summary of the 42 page report which is available on the OACC website. <http://www.organicagcentre.ca/Docs/Canadian%20Organic%20Farmer%20Survey%202008.pdf> (PDF, 367 kb). We are currently editing another report which summarizes the Ontario results from the 147 Ontario participants in this survey. That will be discussed in a future issue.

Executive Summary

Over 3700 research needs surveys were distributed to farmers across Canada with a 16% response rate. The top research needs identified in this survey will be used to inform a prioritization process for research projects in different sectors.

Many producers were relatively new entrants to organic agriculture; 66% had 10 or fewer years in farming, and only 17% had been farming organically for longer than 15 years (n=567). Despite the large number of new entrants, most farmers were over the age of 40; only 14% were younger than 40 years of age. The majority of producers were between 40-60 years of age (62%, n=580). Close to 25% of respondents were over the age of 60.

Canadian Organic Farmer Survey (cont'd)

Most producers were interested in having *research conducted on organic farms* (highest priority) or using *farm scale equipment*. There was less enthusiasm for research conducted at *regional research and demonstration farms*. Research conducted on demonstration or government/university research facilities was perceived to not always be representative of organic farm conditions. Producers underlined the need for *relevant, practical, current research projects with wide application*, while many noted that *regional research was needed for their particular crop/location*.

The top rated research needs in production emphasized holistic management systems including rotations, soil quality, ecological interactions and energy use, with pest control also a top issue. Farmers also indicated a high need for consumer education about organic benefits, which needs to be supported by analysis of the quality and nutrition of organic food. The rankings of research needs varied considerably among producers in different sectors (e.g. field crop producers as opposed to producers of livestock or fruits and berries). Field crop producers were more interested in *information on commodity prices, sales volumes, buyers/brokers* and *market trends and demands* than producers in other sectors.

Parasites were the highest rated issue of concern for livestock producers across Canada. Producers mentioned both *internal and external parasites* for a variety of livestock (primarily cattle, sheep and poultry), including lice, flies, ticks, mange, scours, ringworm, roundworm, pinworm and coccidiosis. Also of interest was livestock breed selection (both modern and heritage breeds) and feed research.

Overall, organic crop producers clearly indicated that research relating to cropping systems and rotations must be emphasized as opposed to development of pest control products. The top four research needs over all sectors and regions related to different aspects of crop rotations:

- *Identifying beneficial crop rotations for specific problems*
- *Understanding soil, weed, insect, and disease interactions in rotations*
- *Managing weeds with rotations (green manures, crop order)*
- *Long term cropping systems research*

Field crop producers were proportionally more interested in these top four rotation topics than were other growers, especially the fruit/berry sector (who mostly grow perennial crops). When the results were analyzed for the 35 producers of exclusively fruits and berries, the top priorities were: *Mechanical weed controls in perennial crops*, *Enhancing natural insect controls*, *Biological insect controls*, *Organically approved fungicides* and *Organically approved insecticides*.

In the soils category, the top research need related to the effect of rotations on soil. Producers identified *rotations*

(*green manures and crop rotation for soil fertility*) as their most important research subject (also ranked 1st in the whole national survey and in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario), followed closely by *soil biology – management to improve existing soil life (e.g. mycorrhizae)* which was 6th overall and rated in the top 8 for every region except BC. Other priorities were not ranked as highly as these top two. The inadequacy of conventional soil tests for organically managed soils was noted by several producers. Interest was high in soil microorganisms, both for novel biological soil tests and ways of improving the soil biota. Other areas of interest were the use of compost and compost teas, vermiculture, use of local amendments (rock powders, high N organic fertilizers), biodynamic soil management (chromatography), and reduced tillage/no-till in a system with cover crops.

For specific information needs, many producers noted an interest in the three options provided as examples on the survey: soil test fact sheets, preferences of buyers, and nutrient management planning. In addition to those topics, marketing, weed control, pest management and soil building were also listed as important information needed by organic producers.

The most significant barriers to the growth of organics described by the farmers were “the lack of infrastructure” and “production costs”. In terms of infrastructure, many farmers identified deficiencies or challenges with processing facilities, transportation, machinery, marketing structures, and storage as barriers to growth. For small farms, access to processing facilities and slaughterhouses emerged as a prominent challenge.

Many farmers also described the cost of farming as a challenge. High production costs included feed for livestock, labour, organic materials, and the rising land prices. Rising land prices were a particular challenge in BC and Ontario, described by one respondent as “*exorbitant*,” and were mentioned as deterring new, younger entrants to farming. Other barriers included certification and regulations issues, potential contamination issues due to pesticides and genetically engineered crops in the production process, lack of consumer knowledge about organic and its misrepresentation.

The most significant opportunity described by organic farmers is the growing demand and markets for organic products. Many farmers described “*huge consumer demand*,” “*growing consumer awareness and demand*,” “*expanding markets*,” “*better markets, more buyers*” and suggested demand will keep growing as consumers become more educated. Another important opportunity expressed by the farmers was the movement towards local food which is contributing to the growing demand for organic foods.

'Tis the Season for Surveys!

All farmers 'enjoy' the frequent surveys they get asking a variety of questions about what they do. I really appreciate the support we continue to get for these. Your comments do make a difference! Depending on the questions, you tell us the issues that matter to you and how we can respond. Unfortunately we cannot always do everything everyone wants as soon as they want it, and not everyone wants the same thing, but as one who has been involved in organic for 25 years, I think we are making progress ... slow but sure.

Following are three links to surveys, each one different. One for sweet corn growers across the Great Lakes Region, one for CSA's and one on your On-Farm Food Safety practices. You may also see them at other conferences this winter but only fill each out once. I know the latter two were also at the CSA conference last month.

CSA Survey

By Kim Thorne, Executive Director, Organic Council of Ontario

Are you a CSA farmer in Ontario? The Organic Council of Ontario needs your feedback! We invite you to participate in a survey initiated by the Organic Council of Ontario in order to understand more about Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) operators in Ontario. This information will help to plan future initiatives with greater insight and consideration for CSA operators.

For completing and returning the survey, your name will be entered into a draw to **win \$250!** We appreciate your quick response so please complete the survey and mail it as soon as possible as the deadline for the draw is **December 19!** Please Note: The information that you provide is confidential. Your information will be compiled by an independent third-party and included in an aggregate evaluation and not on an individual basis to ensure anonymity.

You can access a copy of the survey at <http://www.organiccouncil.ca/content.sz?cid=102> or by contacting the OCO office at 519-827-1221. Thanks!

Great Lakes Sweet Corn IPM Survey

Elaine Roddy, the OMAFRA sweet corn specialist, is working with her counterparts in various states, neighbouring the Great Lake to identify Integrated Pest Management practices and needs throughout the region in various types of production systems including organic. They would like your participation in this survey. Thanks for your help.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=NeTTF3Q19u2AAYGy3K5Xdw_3d_3d

On-Farm Food Safety

By Ian Young, University of Guelph

We are asking you to complete a 15 minutes on-farm food safety online questionnaire so that we can find out what your needs are. This will enable government and other agencies to allocate appropriate funding and resources to the farming community. The questionnaire asks what food safety practices you currently use on your farm and why, and is coordinated by the University of Guelph and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Please enter the link below into your internet browser to complete the questionnaire:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=7C_2fFPLdT4lUrpJgWZODolw_3d_3d

All surveys will be kept confidential. The results will be compiled, summarized and reported in ON Organic, so stay tuned. Please see the first page of the questionnaire for more instructions.

As part of this study, we are also interviewing organic producers to understand more about your thoughts and views about food safety. If you are interested in participating in a short interview about food safety, please contact Ian Young or note this in your comments at the end of the questionnaire.

Ian Young, Graduate student, Department of Population Medicine, University of Guelph
Phone: 519-826-4067, email: iyoung@uoguelph.ca

Winter Courses

This winter, make a resolution to attend some courses or meetings to learn more about your farm business. A couple important opportunities that I am aware of are the Environmental Farm Plan, Growing Your Farm Profits, and Growing Your Opportunities courses.

Environmental Farm Plan

This program has been around for over 15 years and is a great opportunity to review your farm operation and learn more about environmental issues. The program starts with a two day course. Participants are asked to complete a workbook which is a self assessment of the environmental risks on your farm. There are then potential solutions identified and funding opportunities to help reduce the identified risks on the farm.

I encourage all farmers to participate in this program. If you have done one a number of years ago you likely should review it and contact the program representatives to see if it is appropriate to update your workbook and to begin new projects next summer.

I sometimes talk to farmers (including organic) who think they are doing everything right or that there is nothing in this program for them. I completely disagree with this perception. I frequently see little things that organic farmers can improve upon. This program will bring a number of issues to your attention and likely give you some grants to do some of these things, some of which you were planning to do anyway

Call the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association office for more details 1-800-265-9751 or go to www.ontariosoilcrop.org. Current workshops are listed at www.ontariosoilcrop.org/cms/en/Programs/Workshops/ProgramsCalendar.aspx?menuid=60

Growing Your Farm Profits

This is a new course that has been developed by OMAFRA. It is a two day workshop series to help farmers assess their business and develop an action plan. It covers all aspects of an operation, including how to develop a business strategy, marketing, production, human resources, financial management, social responsibility, succession planning and business structure and then set next step action plans for improvement.

As part of the transition to organic and developing your organic farm you have to change a lot of the business aspects of your farm. I see a number of ways that organic

farmers can use the information in this course to help them develop their business and marketing skills. Visit : www.ontario.ca/agbusiness or call 1-888-466-2372 for more details.

Growing Your Opportunities

Quest for New Farm Value workshops – These courses have evolved over the past several years and have been very popular with farmers who want to add more value to their farming operation and the products they sell. It is a two day workshop series for farm and rural based entrepreneurs seeking new and expanding marketplace opportunities, up to 15 workshops will be held across the Province in 2009.

The workshop offers an interactive environment to assist participants to: Find innovative ways to market their new or existing products and services; Create a dynamic but simple business plan; and explore pricing, profit margins and financing a plan.

Visit : www.ontario.ca/agbusiness or call 1-888-466-2372 for more details.

Organic Conferences

Each winter there are several excellent organic conferences within Ontario for you to attend. Over the years the Guelph Organic Conference has evolved to become a major national meeting place for various organic organizations. It is the oldest and largest organic agriculture conference in Canada and one of the oldest in North America. The conference Trade Show and Expo is a major networking opportunity for organic producers new and old and others in the sector, and then there are the many interesting speakers at the conference. Early bird registration discounts apply up until January 2, 2009 – register now <http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>

This year the “6th Annual Social Research in Organic Agriculture” and the “Organic Research Symposium” will each be broadcast on the internet by Webinar. For details contact OACC. To register for the online version of this symposium go to www.oacc.info/symposia/guelph.asp, or you can attend in person by registering at <http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>

Organic Conferences (cont'd)

28th Annual Organic Conference, January 22 – 25, 2009, U. of Guelph, Univ. Centre (workshops, training, seminars)
Theme – “O” is for Opportunity. Workshops and large trade show. This conference is annually attended by 1,500 to 2,000 people from all segments of the organic food value chain.

Jan 22, 2008 –The Great Lakes Grass Energy Symposium
(by REAP)

Jan 22-23, 2008 Courses (by EFAO)

Jan 23, 2008

- 6th Annual Social Research in Organic Agr.
- Organic Research Symposium
- Growing Certified Organic Vegetable Seeds
- Efficient Organic Market Garden Production

Jan 24-25, 2008 – Speakers, Workshops, Trade Show.

Featured speaker is Dr. Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council

For further details, visit <http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>

ECO Farm Day, 2009 presented by the Canadian Organic Growers on February 27-28th, 2009. This year's theme is “The Business of Farming from Field to Fork!” This conference will be held at the Ramada Inn in Cornwall Ontario. Eliot Coleman is their feature speaker this year. Banquet and Gala on February 27th, and Excellent program of workshops on Saturday Feb 28th. Go to www.ecofarmday.ca or call 613-932-7925 for details.

There are also a number of other Organic Events scheduled for this winter. Go to the following links for more details:

EFAO - http://www.efao.ca/pages/courses_workshops.html

COG - <http://www.cog.ca/events.php>

OCO - <http://www.organiccouncil.ca/content.sz?cid=34>

Funding Programs

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters— SMART Program

The Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and the Government of Ontario have partnered to create a \$25-million program to fund productivity improvement projects undertaken in Ontario. If you have at least 10 and no more than 500 employees in your facility, you may be eligible for a grant of up to \$50,000 per project to help you compete more effectively in the global economy.

For more details on this program, go to the [CME SMART](http://www.cme-smart.ca/) website at <http://www.cme-smart.ca/>

Achieving Innovation & Manufacturing Excellence (AIME)

The Yves Landry Foundation, with sponsorship from the Government of Ontario, is making grants of up to \$50,000 available for projects which foster training that will lead to advancements in innovation within the manufacturing sector in Ontario.

Specific funding will be provided for two major objectives:

Objective 1—Retraining of current employees to support the adaptation of new technology, new processes or procedures or other changes within the company to support innovation.

Objective 2—Training that will support and develop highly skilled personnel in any area that leads to innovation that helps the company be more competitive in the global marketplace.

If your company has manufactured a product in Ontario for at least three years (or can demonstrate a solid financial footing), and has between 15 – 1,500 employees in an Ontario facility you may be eligible for training assistance under the AIME program. For more information, go to the Yves Landry Foundation website at

<http://www.yveslandryfoundation.com/Programs.shtm>

Regulatory

Delayed—Federal Organic Regulations

The *Organic Products Regulations* are being amended to change the coming-into-force date from December 14, 2008 to June 30, 2009. This amendment responds to industry stakeholders' request to extend the transition period of the regulations, originally scheduled to end on December 14, 2008, to June 30, 2009. For more information go to the Canada Gazette (Government of Canada's) website at <http://canadagazette.gc.ca/partII/2008/20080917/html/sor279-e.html>

Industry News

Changes to Tax Service

The Ministry of Revenue has launched ONT-TAXS (Ontario's Tax Services), an initiative to make services easier, faster and more convenient for Ontario's businesses.

The first step was to launch 1-866-ONT-TAXS, a single toll-free number that replaces 39 existing toll-free numbers. Clients now have "one-window" service delivery and convenient access to information, 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

Remaining parts of the ONT-TAXS initiative that are coming soon include:

- one Business Number for simpler transactions;
- 24/7 access to on-line services including paying taxes electronically,
- plus online viewing of tax account history; and
- improvements to service delivery (for example: accessible service;
- simplified returns; and a reduction in the number of forms and letters).

For more information on the ONT-TAXS initiative, go to the [Ministry of Revenue's](http://www.rev.gov.on.ca/english/about/onttaxs.html) website at <http://www.rev.gov.on.ca/english/about/onttaxs.html>

New Legislation Proposed - Ideas for the Future Act, 2008

On September 23, 2008, the Ontario government introduced new legislation to support business start-ups that commercialize new technology by public research institutions. If the legislation is approved, new businesses in Ontario that commercialize eligible intellectual property developed by qualifying Canadian universities, colleges or research institutes would be eligible to claim a 10-year corporate income tax refund.

The tax exemption – the first of its kind in Canada – would encourage commercialization of public research in areas such as bio-economy/clean technologies, advanced health technologies, and telecommunications, computer and digital technologies.

More information can be found at the Ministry of Finance's website at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/media/2008/bk09-otec.html>

Current programs and tax incentives designed to encourage innovation in Ontario include:

Ontario Innovation Tax Credit (OITC)

- Small and medium-sized Ontario corporations are able to claim a 10 per cent refundable tax credit on qualifying research and development (R&D) expenditures in Ontario.

Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit

- For taxation years ending after 2008, Ontario corporations are able to claim a 4.5 per cent non-refundable tax credit on qualifying R&D expenditures in Ontario.

Ontario Business-Research Institute (OBRI) Tax Credit

- Ontario corporations are able to claim a 20 per cent refundable tax credit for qualifying R&D expenditures incurred in Ontario as part of an eligible research contract with an eligible Ontario research institute. Ontario corporations are able to claim the OITC in addition the OBRI Tax Credit for potential combined Ontario tax credits of 30% on qualifying R&D expenditures in Ontario.

Innovation Demonstration Fund

- Provides financial support of up to 50 per cent of eligible costs to help Ontario companies with the commercialization and initial demonstration of their innovative technologies.

Next Generation of Jobs Fund with three streams of funding:

- *Jobs and Investment Program* to help companies in a range of sectors to expand in Ontario and develop innovative products for global markets - up to 15 per cent of eligible project costs.
- *Biopharmaceutical Investment Program* to support the expansion of research and advanced manufacturing by pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms - up to 20 per cent of eligible project costs.
- *Strategic Opportunities Program* to support industry-led, public-private collaborations focused on increasing Ontario's innovation expertise in the bio-economy and clean technologies, advanced health technologies and creative industries - up to 25 per cent of eligible project/program costs.

Ontario Research Commercialization Program

- Provides grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$750,000 a year for up to three years, to help publicly funded Ontario research institutions and not-for-profit organizations transfer their research to the marketplace.

Pre-budget Consultations – Further dates to be announced

Finance Minister Dwight Duncan launched his annual pre-budget consultations in London on October 30, 2008. Further pre-budget consultations will be held in Sault Ste. Marie, Windsor, Ottawa, Toronto and Thunder Bay. Check the Ministry of Finance's website for dates and locations of scheduled consultations at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/consultations/prebud09/calendar.html>

The Ministry of Finance consultations provide the opportunity to share your views on what more the government can do during this period of global economic uncertainty to promote economic growth and job creation. If you would like to inquire about attending the pre-budget consultation, please phone 1-866-989-9002.

Other ways to take part in the 2009 pre-budget consultations include taking the online poll at http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/consultations/prebud09/pbc_poll.html participating in the e-consultations at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/consultations/prebud09/> or sending a submission by mail, e-mail or fax.

WSIB/Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium (EMC) Safety Group (SG)

The Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium is taking applications for its 2009 Safety Group.

Safety Group members implement world-class safety initiatives and continue to achieve double-digit percentage reductions in accident frequency and severity, as well as out-performing Ontario manufacturers' average.

Go to EMC Safety Group for information on how to join at <http://www.emccanada.org/Content.cfm?C=7012&SC=1&SCM=1&MI=2439&L1M=2439>

Events

Agri-Food Innovation Forum 2009

Food, A Healthy Value Proposition: The Appetite Continues

Toronto, February 10—12, 2009

This year's topics include

- Taking care of the nation's health
- Agriculture and food innovation and disease prevention
- From concept to success - developing and marketing innovative food
- Strategies for commercialization - from local to the corporate perspective
- Food marketing - the retailer perspective
- Nutrition policy and promotion
- Emerging science in agriculture and food
- Applying agriculture to good health

For conference details and registration information, go to the Agri-Food Innovation Forum website at <http://www.emccanada.org/Content.cfm?C=7012&SC=1&SCM=1&MI=2439&L1M=2439>

Links to Organic Agriculture Information

Organic Council of Ontario (OCO)

<http://www.organiccouncil.ca>

Canadian Organic Growers (COG)

<http://www.cog.ca>

OMAFRA Organic Agriculture

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html>

Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO)

<http://www.efao.ca>

Organic Agricultural Centre of Canada (OACC)

<http://www.oacc.info>

Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300

E-mail: ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca

Northern Ontario Regional Office: 1-800-461-6132

www.ontario.ca/omafra