



Welcome to ON Organic

Evan Elford, New Crop Development Specialist, OMAFRA

It's exciting to see the diversity of organic workshops and conferences taking place through the winter again this year. Many speakers from within and outside of the province will be sharing their on-farm experiences, research results and industry experiences at numerous meetings from November through March. We look forward to seeing you at events throughout the fall and winter. Please refer to the events section of this newsletter for more information.



We hope you enjoy this month's edition of ON Organic with information about fall calving herds and managing soil compaction. Also, be sure to download your free copies of the new transition reports from the Organic Value Chain Round Table (links available on page 4).

As always, we want to hear from you! Are there livestock, crop or business management issues you are facing or would like to learn more about? Please let us know so we can address it for you (and others) in an upcoming newsletter!



We welcome your comments and any suggestions for topics in the newsletter. Thank you once again to our contributing authors and to EFAO, OCO and others who pass along our newsletter on a regular basis.

Subscription to this newsletter is easy and no cost. For details go to the webpage:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/subscribe/indx.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.ontario.ca/organic> and <http://www.ontario.ca/biologique>

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Consider a Fall Calving Herd

Brian Pogue, OMAFRA Beef Cattle Program Lead

The majority of consumers prefer to buy their meat as a fresh product. Consequently the market is dependent on a consistent supply throughout the year. For the beef industry this can be a significant challenge as a result of the vast majority of calves being born in the spring. For those times of short supply, cattle are often held over or shipped early, neither of which is ideal.

One of the advantages about being a cow calf producer is the inherent flexibility. Some years you can market calves shortly after weaning or decide to sell them as yearlings in the spring or as long yearlings in the fall. The same can apply to calving season – winter, spring, late spring, summer or even fall. There are relatively few who calve in the fall – late August through to October. These producers are satisfied with the production efficiency and the strength of the market when their cattle are ready for market as calves, yearlings or finished cattle. The New Liskeard Research Center compared traditional spring calving to summer calving which resulted in a significant advantage of profit for the herd that calved out on the grass.

This year with calves at record prices, there is a tendency to retain more cows. The hope is to get one more calf from those poor cows. But the cull cow market is also at record prices. I would encourage you to cull those cows that pose a problem - a poor performing calf, are in poor condition, have bad feet, poor udders or some combination; most of which are related to age. While you are at it, cull those with nasty

temperament – it needs to be fun as well as profitable. Take the money from these cull cows and invest in some young cows or heifers which will last for a long time.

But what about those good young 2 and 3 year olds which worked hard to wean a good calf but are open? It is tough to just ship them but even tougher to justify holding on to them for another year. You could provide them a second chance by breeding them now and starting a fall calving herd. The economics could work! The fall calvers should be split from those calving in the spring as the management will be different. These cows can and should calve outside. With proper calving bulls there will not be any calving problems with the possible exception of twins. When provided with adequate windbreaks and shelters for the calves, these cows can be kept outside all year. With wet conditions in the spring, the cows would need to be moved to well drained gravel ground or in to a barnyard.

It would be important to discuss feed requirements for this herd with your nutritionist/feed representative. The requirements during the winter will be higher than the dry spring calving cows. Rolling out hay on a field or using a TMR mixer will give everyone even the calves a chance to get the “good stuff”. Protein blocks could be considered if hay quality is poor. Providing feed to the calves either with a home grown mix or a commercial creep will help both the calves’ growth and the condition of the cows.

Wet Fall + Compaction = Next Year's Roots?

Anne Verhallen, OMAFRA Horticulture Soil Management Specialist

Ruts, packed headlands and infield compaction – you know we have it all this year. Wet soils, overcast, poor drying days and a late harvest have combined to make compaction and rutted fields a real problem. A little bit of tillage can put it out of sight and out of mind for now. Will we pay for this next year? Probably – it really depends upon the growing season. In the end it all comes down to roots and access to water.

Compaction research has shown yield impacts of 0 to 80 per cent depending upon growing conditions and the degree of compaction. So why the big range? Of course weather plays a part; generally if we have timely rains that keep the soil softer for roots to explore and rains that regularly feed the crop – compaction is not a big

problem. Unfortunately those timely rains are rare. So what is really happening with the roots? Research from Northern Europe suggests that root response to soil compaction depends on the presence and distribution patterns of soil pores. We know that compaction decreases overall pore size and number. The common response of roots is to decrease overall root length – so less access to pores. There tends to be more horizontal root growth which concentrates roots in the upper layers of soil – again fewer pores to access water from. Roots also tend to respond to compaction by getting thicker. This costs the plant more in energy which helps to explain the yield hit but it also restricts the pore size that those roots can access. In summary, compacted roots are shorter and fatter and can't reach the water in pores.

Wet Fall + Compaction = Next Year's Roots? (Cont'd)



Figure 1: Compacted layers can develop over time or after a wet harvest like 2014 and interfere with root development.

What can I do to fix that?

In the short term there is not much that can be done to "fix" the problem. Many people are plowing or disking rutted fields in order to break up or at least cover the ruts. The damage to the soil profile is still there. Allowing more water and potentially frost in will help to start the recovery from compaction. Shallow tillage in the spring may help to create some short term pores for a part of the season.



Figure 2: Ruts and headland compaction can really reduce soil pores and in turn reduce water and air movement.

If you still have harvest to complete – reduce the weight in harvest aids like grain buggies, load trucks outside the field (but don't leave muddy, unsafe roads) and if necessary concentrate compaction in travel lanes. These compacted zones can be dealt with later rather than compacting most of the field.



Figure 3: Surface soil compaction can occur easily in the spring, particularly after a wet harvest. This field seemed to show every spring equipment pass.

Longer term

Consider all the ways that you can build a stronger more flexible soil that can bounce back from bad harvest conditions. A varied or complex crop rotation with wheat, the addition of manure or other organic materials, use of cover crops and of course reducing tillage and overall traffic will help to build a more stable soil structure. Improving drainage can help to improve overall soil structure over time. Consider equipment weight and tire pressure to reduce ground pressure and the potential for deep and lasting compaction.

New Transition Reports from the Organic Value Chain Roundtable: Organic Grain, Vegetable and Beef Production

Three new reports have been released from the Organic Value Chain Roundtable that provides a strong business case for going organic.

These commodity-specific guides targeted to conventional producers and lenders provide beef, grain, and vegetable producers with an overview of the market opportunities, economics, as well as government and industry support available to help guide new entrants towards a successful transition. The reports will also be useful to lenders and others with an interest in the economic viability of organic agriculture.

With phenomenal growth in the industry and shortfalls in domestic production, the reports provide timely information to producers wanting to diversify their operations and marketing options. According to a 2013 report by the Canada Organic Trade Association, Canadian sales of organic products have tripled since 2006 to reach \$3 billion. Exports of Canadian organic goods to other countries topped \$450 million in 2012.

The reports are available for download at: <ftp://ftp.agr.gc.ca/pub/outgoing/misb-eb/Organic%20-%20Produits%20Biologiques/>.

Organic Advantage: Vegetable Production

This guide paints a picture of strong demand filled largely by imported products from the US and Mexico. Less than 25% of the domestic demand for organic vegetables at retail is filled by Canadian producers. In fact, for vegetables such as organic cauliflower, beets and spinach, 100% of the domestic retail demand is met by imports. The guide shows the demand for the main organic vegetable types and retail price trends relative to conventional.

Organic Advantage: Grain Production

This guide provides details of the Canadian acreage devoted to organic cereal grains and oilseed production, prices, operating expenses, margins and yields, and points producers towards resources that can help them transition from conventional to organic.

Organic Advantage: Beef Production

The beef guide provides guidance and resources for producers who want to add value to their organic crops through livestock grazing.

Looking for Information on Cover Crops?

Cover crops have a lot of places where they can fit in horticultural crop rotations. Before late planted crops like pumpkins to provide weed suppression. After early harvested crops like peas or snap beans to cover and protect the soil while enhancing soil structure. After winter wheat to suppress resistant weeds in the rotation or as a part of the overall crop rotation to suppress nematodes in preparation for planting strawberries.



Looking for more details on how a cover crop can fit, herbicide concerns or the basics on a particular cover crop species? There is an improved version of the Purdue Midwest Cover Crop Field Guide available now. The pocket guide, released Monday (Sept. 22), is produced by Purdue University and the Midwest Cover Crops Council. The first cover crops guide was released in February 2012. The updated guide is in response to the increasing interest in cover crops in the Midwest and to requests for additional information.

"All this new information will help farmers better choose appropriate cover crops for their situation and better manage the cover crops they grow - all for greater potential benefit for their soils and cash crop growth," said Eileen Kladviko, Purdue professor of agronomy.

The updated guide features seven new topics:

- Getting started in cover crops.
- Rationale for fitting cover crops into different cropping systems.
- Suggested cover crops for common rotations.
- Cover crop effects on cash crop yields.
- Climate considerations including winter hardiness and water use.
- Adapting seeding rates and spring management based on weather.
- "Up and coming" cover crops.

There also is more information about herbicide carryover, manure and biosolids applications, and crop insurance issues (note: US crop insurance issues). There has been a significant contribution from Ontario research to the new material, particularly in the area of herbicide carryover (Dr. Darren Robinson, University of Guelph-Ridgetown campus). The guide's second edition is available at Purdue Extension's The Education Store at www.the-education-store.com. Search by the name of the publication or product code ID-433. Purdue University agronomy professor Eileen Kladviko explaining the benefits of cover crops is available at <http://youtu.be/2NlyQeZ8jxQ>

Learning Opportunities

Nutrient Management eLearning Courses

We heard your requests!

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has online nutrient management courses!

Our training courses give learners the tools to safely manage nutrients while protecting the environment. Take our courses to become a government-certified Nutrient Management Planner or Consultant.

Our eLearning format allows you to learn on your own time and at your own pace. The newest eLearning course – Introduction to Nutrient Management – provides a basic understanding of nutrient management best management practices. This course will be of interest to a wider audience beyond those who require certification.

Visit the [University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus](#) website for more information on in-class and online nutrient management training options.

Contact the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus for more information:

Toll Free: 1-855-648-1444

Email: mmcdonal@uoguelph.ca

Organic Seed Workshops, 2014 – Presented by Everdale

As part of their work for The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, Everdale is offering a special series of organic seed production workshops in 2014 across Ontario.

The final workshop of 2014 currently scheduled in Ontario will take place on December 5-6 during the EFAO Farmer Training Conference in Orillia, Ontario.

For more information on seed workshops near you, please visit the Everdale website at: <http://everdale.org/workshops/organicseed/> or contact Aabir Dey, Regional Coordinator for the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security for Ontario at 519.855.4859 ext.103; email: aabir.dey@everdale.org.

Conferences, Meetings and Tours

1st Annual Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario Conference

Date: December 4-6, 2014

Location: Geneva Park YMCA, 6604 Rama Rd., Orillia
To celebrate EFAO's 35th Anniversary, we're launching our first annual conference.

You can expect 200 participants on beautiful Lake Couchiching with over 30 intermediate and advanced level workshops on market gardening, livestock, soil health, seed saving, field crops and more!

More information: Please visit the website at www.efao.ca.

Organic by Design

34th Annual Guelph Organic Conference

Date: January 29-February 1, 2015

Location: University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario

For more information please visit the website at:

<http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>

Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention (OFVC)

Date: February 18-19, 2015

Location: Scotiabank Convention Centre, 6815 Stanley Ave, Niagara Falls, Ontario

More information: For more information, please visit the website at www.ofvc.ca

Getting to the Roots: Successful Organic Farming Eco Farm Day, 2015

Date: Saturday, February 21, 2015

Call for Volunteers: Volunteers are currently being invited to join the Eco Farm Day Organization Team to complete the plans and take on various essential roles to make this conference happen for organic farmers in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec.

If you are interested in volunteering at Eco Farm Day 2015, please contact Coordinator of Volunteers, Johanna at cogoso.volunteers.jc@gmail.com and cc Gary Weinhold at weinhold_g@yahoo.ca.

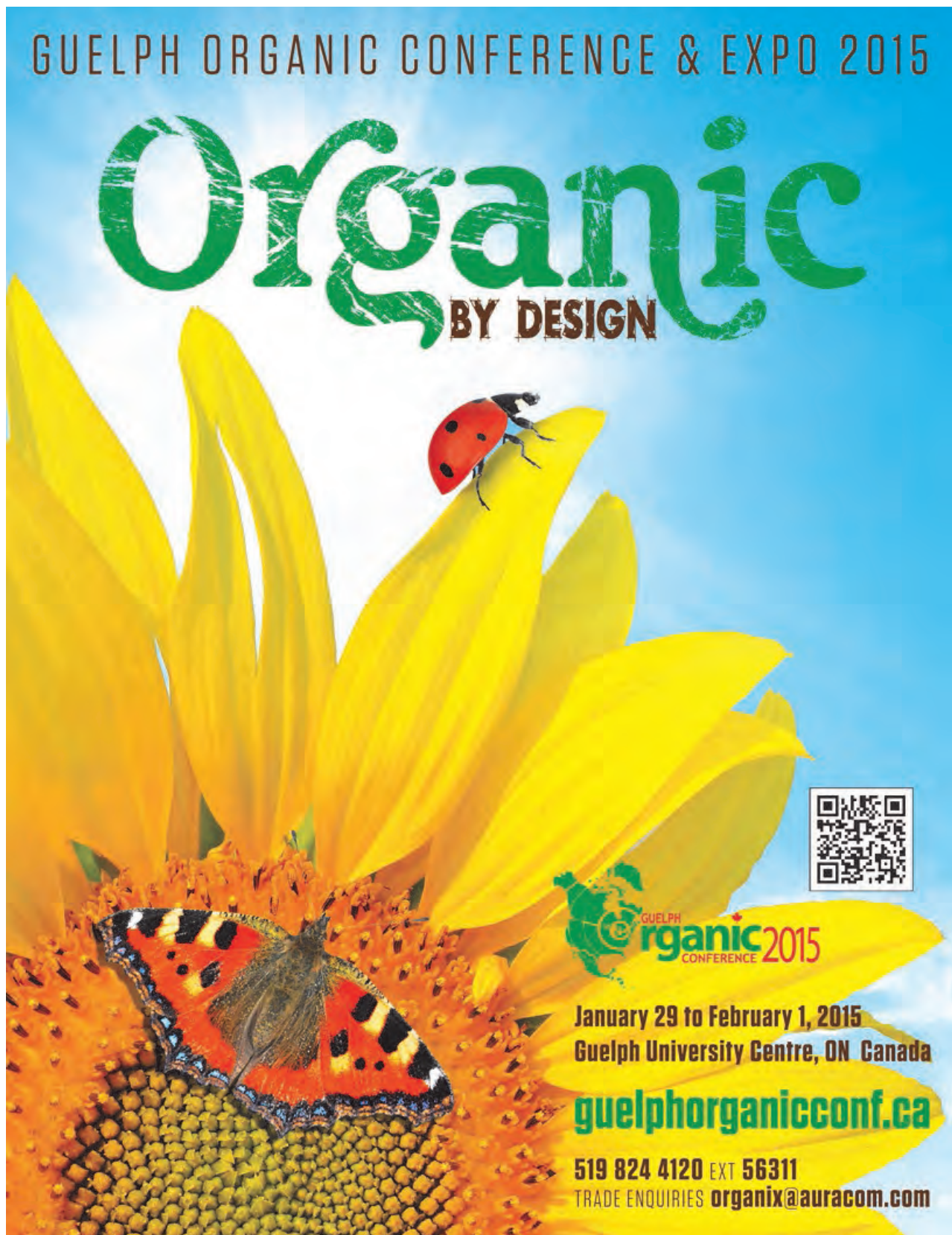
For more information about Eco Farm Day 2015, please visit the COG website at: <http://cog.ca/ottawa/eco-farm-day/>

**Conferences, Meetings and Tours
(Cont'd)**

GUELPH ORGANIC CONFERENCE & EXPO 2015

Organic

BY DESIGN



 **CONFERENCE 2015**

January 29 to February 1, 2015
Guelph University Centre, ON Canada

guelphorganicconf.ca

519 824 4120 EXT 56311
TRADE ENQUIRIES organix@auracom.com

Scholarship Opportunities

The Guelph Organic Conference Eco-Scholar Program is Back!

Thanks to an Emerald Way sponsorship from The Big Carrot, the Eco-Scholar program, first run in 2004, is back! If you are a registered student at a high school, community college or university (undergrad or grad), you are strongly encouraged to apply.

The Guelph Organic Conference runs from January 29th to February 1st, 2015, in the Guelph University Centre. Founded in 1982 by students, the Guelph Organic Conference has become Canada's leading grassroots organic marketing show with a free 2-day Organic Expo featuring over 150 exhibitors. There is also an impressive list of over 60 speakers whose messages are targeted at progressive producers, entrepreneurial processors and motivated consumers.

The 34th Conference & Expo theme is 'Organic by Design', which highlights workshops such as Designing Perennial Polycultures, Keyline Design, Permaculture Design plus several BioDynamic farming workshops.

The Big Carrot eco-scholarship opportunity will be awarded to five students, and each will receive an Organic Food & Wine Dinner ticket, a Keynote Forum ticket plus a distinctive identifiable Saturday/Sunday workshop badge.

Qualified applicants are required to complete an application form on-line that asks for an essay of 250 words or less about their involvement with organic food & farming. Eco-Scholars will be selected by January 1st, 2015, so don't delay. This is a prestige award! Guelph Conference traders & guests will notice the Eco-Scholars!

The link to the survey can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/s/28TDPR8. The deadline for applications to be considered is December 22nd.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the eco-scholarship coordinator, Gayl, at gumbootgourmet@gmail.com.



Links to ON Organic Information & Staff Contacts

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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.ontario.ca/organic>

Ecological Farmers of Ontario (EFO)

<http://www.efao.ca>

Organic Agricultural Centre of Canada

<http://www.oacc.info>

FarmStart www.farmstart.ca

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