

2014-2018 NB Organic Strategic Plan Progress Report: Year One

Prepared for NB Organic Committee

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March 2015

The following is a summary of the status of the New Brunswick Organic Strategic Plan implementation. ACORN has taken a lead, via the ACORN NB Coordinator position, on implementing the strategic plan with direction provided by the NB Organic Committee. Funding support has been provided by NBDAAF through the Developing Management Skills Program for the period from May 2014-March 2015.

The strategic plan has been a significant guide-point and driver for organic sector growth in the Province, but many of the activities listed in the Strategic Plan are broader in scope than the organic sector, positively impacting all producers in the Province.

As demonstrated in the body of this document, the organic sector has taken action on 66% of the listed priority activities. With the Strategic Plan entering its second year, the NB organic sector is committed to continuing efforts that advance organics and agriculture in general in New Brunswick. Next steps will be identified collectively by the sector in the coming year.

The Plan identified four “Key Result Areas” each with strategic priority actions and short-, medium-, and long-term goals. The former two are listed below and progress on each goal is detailed in the document.

Consumer education:

Increase consumer understanding of the meaning of the term “organic.”

Increase consumer understanding of the value of organic products.

Increase consumer awareness of the availability of New Brunswick-produced organic products.

Sector capacity:

Foster educational opportunities and encourage the development of governmental programs that enhance the financial viability of NB organic farms.

Increase the amount of New Brunswick organic product.

Support new entrants to the sector as much as possible.

Certification & Regulations

Raise awareness about the new provincial organic regulation.

Make certification more accessible to encourage more farms to certify.

Address scale-appropriateness of various regulations.

Market Access & Distribution

Make New Brunswick organic products more accessible for consumers.

Develop a greater understanding of market trends and opportunities.

Encourage collaboration in marketing and distribution where there is possibility and interest.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Vision Statement

The New Brunswick organic sector fosters a vibrant industry and community that engages in environmentally, economically and socially sustainable farming and processing practices, providing the highest quality and healthiest food to consumers.

Mission Statement

The New Brunswick organic sector will actively support new and existing organic enterprises and uphold organic integrity through educating consumers, increasing sector capacity and fostering the sustainability of the sector.

Strategic Goal

We will facilitate simultaneous expansion of New Brunswick organic market share and sector production capacity, while also increasing appreciation for our products.

Values

- Healthy and safe food
- Sustainable production and processing methods for products that are produced in a socially and environmentally responsible way
- Protecting the integrity of the organic sector
- Economically viable food production (fair pay for farmers, processors, and farm labourers, as well as a fair price for consumers)
- Resilience of the sector as a component of local food systems

CONSUMER EDUCATION

Strategic Priorities

- Increase consumer understanding of the meaning of the term “organic.”
- Increase consumer understanding of the value of organic products.
- Increase consumer awareness of the availability of New Brunswick-produced organic products.

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Short-term			
Produce local organic promotional materials that make clear the legitimacy of organic claims and the benefits of organic products, continuing to promote and expand on the <i>Local Organic...Better Together</i> messaging alongside the national <i>Think Before You Eat</i> campaign. These materials should be bilingual, accessible to producers, and distributed widely (e.g. retailers, natural health practitioners, etc).	ACORN/ NBDAAF/ Producers	Number of distribution points for materials Rise in interest and inquiries about organic products (producer survey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A suite of new materials was produced and distributed to organic farms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure targeting consumers • Posters for farms, markets, retailers • Weather-resistant signs for farms • Food-grade stickers to feature on products • Brochures distributed to stores participating in Organic Week
Maintain current information on local organic producers on ACORN’s online Organic Directory and Local Organic Guide booklet.	ACORN/ Producers	Local Organic Guides printed and distributed; Online directory updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Organic Guide printed in April 2014; ACORN website updated & maintained
Explore the feasibility and value of a video project to feature NB organic producers and profile their farms.	Producers/ ACORN/ ACOA/Film Schools	Contacts made with potential funders and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial concept/feasibility meeting held with VideoBand, an NB-based production company • Funding possibilities discussed with ACOA (not a fit for their programming)

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Medium-term			
Provide food skills education and support for consumers (e.g. recipes featuring NB organic products during Organic Week, consumer workshop stream at ACORN Conference, in-store food demos, etc).	ACORN/ Retailers/ Community Partners (Green Village, Sunrise Farm)/ Producers	Number of events the organic sector coordinates and/or participates in; Number of resources created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What's Organic About Organic? and why it matters" community info sessions held during Organic Week in Saint John (Rockwood Park) and Fredericton (NB Community Harvest Gardeners), reaching approximately 25 people
Increase sector participation in the Organic Celebration to fully realize the consumer education potential of this annual event.	NB Organic Committee/ Producers/ Retailers	Number of producers, processors, retailers, and consumers who take part in the event	
Build relationships with media to be able to pitch positive stories and have the NB organic sector (producers, inspectors, ACORN) featured in the media more often.	ACORN/ Producers	Increase in organic media coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 radio, 1 television, and 1 print media interviews on the NB Organic Grade Regulation announcement • CBC Moncton contact reached out to ACORN for stories: Michael Phillips orcharding workshops got coverage and brought to light how much opportunity there is with organic apples in the province; Radio-Canada (television) also covered story
Long-term			
Develop an educational toolkit on organic food and farming for teachers for all school levels and offer to do presentations on NB organics for students. Partner with school gardens to educate about organic growing practices where possible.	Producers/ Schools/ NBFSAN/ Community Inclusion Networks/ Falls Brook Centre/ 4-H Clubs/ Seed suppliers	Level of interest by teachers Number of schools/groups/gardens presented to or partnered with	

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Identify and pursue new opportunities to piggyback on environmental events and initiatives to raise awareness about the environmental benefits of NB organics (e.g. Enviro-thon).	CCNB/Other community and environmental groups	Number of events/ initiatives that include organic farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2014: ACORN presentation on CSAs at Incredible Edible Food Festival in Moncton

SECTOR CAPACITY

Strategic Priorities

- Foster educational opportunities and encourage the development of governmental programs that enhance the financial viability of NB organic farms.
- Increase the amount of New Brunswick organic product.
- Support new entrants to the sector as much as possible.

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Short-term			
Maintain development on the New Brunswick Organic Strategic Plan by organizing annual, in-person planning and evaluation sessions.	NB Organic Committee/ NBDAAF	Progress reports completed annually and presented at meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •8th NB Organic Forum held February 18, 2015 •Strategic Plan progress report shared at this event
Request that the <i>Capturing Crop Opportunities through Season Extension and On-Farm Storage Technologies</i> program continue and expand to include support for freezing technologies.	NBDAAF/ NB Organic Committee	Number of projects funded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Program request granted for 2014-15 year as <i>Advancing Agriculture through Season Extension & On-farm Storage Technologies</i>, including expansion to freezing technologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •24 projects received; 21 approved (15 season extension and 7 on-farm storage) •\$83,000 of a \$90,000 total program budget distributed to date

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Request that all government programs being created or renewed offer a greater percentage (at least 10%) of support for beginner farmers.	NB Organic Committee/ NBDAAF	Increase in beginner farmers accessing provincial funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Request made at 2014 meeting with Minister •Greater percentage of support carried forward with <i>Advancing Agriculture through Season Extension & On-farm Storage Technologies</i> •Greater support also offered through <i>Agriculture By Choice</i> program for beginner farmers
Place special emphasis on on-going training for new entrants to agriculture and organics through workshops, webinars, a special new farmer stream at the ACORN Conference, more farm tours, etc., while also continuing to offer training for experienced producers.	ACORN/ NBDAAF	Number of training events for beginner and experienced organic farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2014 ACORN Beginner Farmer Symposium drew 120 people (about half from NB) •2014 ACORN Conference featured full-day Beginner Farmer Learning Series
Review obstacles to participation in the Grow A Farmer Apprenticeship and Mentorship program and support and promote broader uptake.	ACORN/ Producers/ New entrants	Increase in program participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2014: no NB apprentices and 1 mentorship arrangement under Grow A Farmer •2015: Grow A Farmer apprenticeship under review with host farms; mentorships available
Medium-term			
Keep abreast of and support value-added and infrastructure projects in the province and seize opportunities when possible (e.g. Real Food Connections' co-packing facility).	NB Organic Committee/ NBDAAF/ Producers/Real Food Connections	Letters of support written; updates provided to the group; projects involving NB organics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ACORN Board invested in Real Food Connections' 2014 campaign in support of its expansion plans, which include the creation of a "NB Food Centre" (processing kitchen and storage facility), in addition to a Saint John retail outlet and enhanced distribution throughout the province

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Explore seasonal labour exceptions in existing wage subsidy programs (e.g. One-Job Pledge) and/or propose the development of a specific farm labourer wage subsidy program in order to create more opportunities for skilled farm labourers and to address labour needs of organic farms.	NB Dept of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour/ NBDAAF/ NB Organic Committee	Increase in availability of funding support for farmers to create job opportunities	
Expand services and outreach to the New Brunswick Francophone community.	ACORN/ NBDAAF	Number of services that ACORN is able to provide to the Francophone community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New local organic promotional materials available in both official languages •2014 CSA Shareholder Survey offered in both official languages
Facilitate awareness and uptake of government funding such as business development and environmental programs, as well as the Environmental Farm Plan by organic producers.	ACORN/ NBDAAF/ Agricultural Alliance	Number of organic farms in the province accessing government funding and with Environmental Farm Plans	
Long-term			
Increase level of producer engagement with the NB Organic Committee, with a particular focus on new entrants.	NB Organic Committee	Number of producers engaged in Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2014: approximately 7-8 producers regularly attend meetings

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Partner with key organizations to address issues of land access and explore solutions to connect those looking for farmland with those who have farmland available (e.g farms as incubators).	Agricultural Alliance/ NFU in NB/ NBDAAF/ FarmLink/ LandShare Canada (COG)	Partnerships established; mechanisms or efforts in place	

CERTIFICATION & REGULATIONS

Strategic Priorities

- Raise awareness about the new provincial organic regulation.
- Make certification more accessible to encourage more farms to certify.
- Address scale-appropriateness of various regulations.

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Short-term			
Develop and execute an education strategy for the new provincial organic regulation, including media releases, promotional materials, info sessions, fact sheets, and notifications to key partners (e.g. Agricultural Alliance, NFU in NB, farmers' markets, etc).	NBDAAF/ ACORN/ Producers	Number of materials created and distributed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •3 radio, 1 television, and 1 print media interviews as a result of press release, including coverage on: CBC World at Six NB; CBC Information Morning Fredericton; and Global TV 6:00 News •ACORN partnered with NBDAAF to create educational resources on the regulation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •NBDAAF sent a factsheet to approximately 1300 farms and 23 farmers' markets •ACORN shared them at the 2014 AANB AGM •FAQs document created and posted online •ACORN also distributed regulation factsheets to NB retailers (36) and restaurants (23) focused on local/organic food •8th NB Organic Forum featured discussion among sector on the regulation and complaint process

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
<p>Request that the <i>Capturing Organic Development Opportunities</i> program continue under the Growing Forward 2 framework and include support for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Strategic initiatives that advance the entire sector and consideration for other organic-specific needs as priorities; 2) Certification cost-sharing during the transition years for new entrants to the organic sector for the extent of the program; 3) Certification cost-sharing for all organic operations for a period of one year while the new provincial organic regulation is phased in. 	<p>NB Organic Committee/ NBDAAF</p>	<p>Number of projects funded</p>	<p>It was recognized that a proposal for a new organic funding program was not immediately appropriate, but requests for each identified component were made at the 2014 meeting with the Minister:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continued strategic support for ACORN was discussed, but no funding solution found <p>Project funds of \$20,000 to implement the Strategic Plan were provided to ACORN for 2014-15</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Certification cost-sharing during transition years maintained in Agriculture By Choice program (for beginner farmers only) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 projects approved in 2014 <p>Request made to extend this support to transitional growers not granted</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Further discussions with NBDAAF led NB Organic Committee to focus request for certification cost-sharing on new entrant support only
<p>Celebrate new entrants to the organic sector with public announcements in ACORN's newsletter/e-news/website.</p>	<p>ACORN/ Producers/ Certification Bodies</p>	<p>Announcements published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article written for ACORN Fall 2014 Newsletter by one new entrant (les jardins anicha) on their first-season challenges and inspirations
<p>Medium-term</p>			

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Catalogue and monitor regulatory changes that impact small-scale operations and approach regulators to make them aware of issues when appropriate (e.g. food safety regulations; seed saving restrictions).	NB Organic Committee	List of problematic regulations created; letters written to and/or meetings held with regulators	
Promote the multi-faceted benefits of certification (traceability and accountability; environmental sustainability; customer guarantee; marketing clarity; sector-wide information sharing and promotion; industry-defined process) as a means of encouraging more farms to certify.	ACORN/ Producers/ Certification Bodies	Increase in number of farms that certify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New "Organic Business Case" resources developed by the Organic Value Chain Roundtable that showcase profitability of organics distributed at ACORN Conference, AANB AGM, HortNS
Continue to expand and promote ACORN's Organic Transition specialist services in New Brunswick.	ACORN/ NBDAAF/ Certification Bodies/ Producers	Increase in number of NB farms using the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2014: 4 farms visited by Organic Transition Coordinator in NB, plus 3 additional requests that could not be met
Explore opportunities for recognition of the Ecological Goods & Services that are offered by the organic sector.	NB Organic Committee/ Agricultural Alliance (Environmental Farm Plan)	Possibilities and key partners identified; opportunities assessed	

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Long-term			
Encourage more on-farm seed saving and seed exchanges among producers in order to address the challenge of sourcing organic seed, and ensure organic producers are kept informed about potential seed saving restrictions stemming from proposed federal regulations and trade agreements.	Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security (ACORN)/ Producers	Number of farms saving seed; Number of seed exchanges held (Seedy Saturdays)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2014: Field day including seed saving demonstrations for vegetable and grain crops in Albert County • 2014: 2 NB farms participated in seed production trials • 2015: Bauta-funded project for Knowlesville Arts & Nature Centre to build seed-saving capacity and identify varieties suitable for seed production in the region

MARKET ACCESS & DISTRIBUTION

Strategic Priorities

- Make New Brunswick organic products more accessible for consumers.
- Develop a greater understanding of market trends and opportunities.
- Encourage collaboration in marketing and distribution where there is possibility and interest.

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Short-term			
Continue to build on existing relationships with NB retailers and restaurants to track their organic product sourcing, both local and out-of-province, in order to increase ordering of local organic product.	ACORN/ Producers/ Retailers/ Restaurants	Number of NB retailers and restaurants who are purchasing local organic products; Increase in NB organic product sales	
Create a shared calendar and/or list-serv to allow producers to coordinate potential shared transport-ation for deliveries.	NB Organic Committee/ Producers	Communication tool is created and has uptake	
Gather consumer data in order to better understand the barriers to local organic purchases.	ACORN/ NBDAAF	Sector has better understanding of consumers	
Medium-term			

Action	Potential Collaborators	Indicators	Progress
Develop a long-term marketing strategy that responds to the consumer data gathered.	NB Organic Committee/ Producers	Opportunities and partners identified	
Improve purchasing convenience for consumers by promoting organic product points of sale (farmers markets, retail outlets, etc).	ACORN/ Producers	Number of promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Organic Week 2014 partnerships with 7 retailers, farmers, and organizations showcased availability of organic product
Support the development of organic CSAs as part of a broader initiative to promote information exchange and collaboration among CSA producers.	ACORN/ Producers	Increase in number of organic CSAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ACORN CSA Network website with CSA directory, resources and farmer forum launched in June 2014 •Network to be officially launched as organic-only network in March 2015
Work with farmers' markets to increase the presence and representation of organic products at markets.	Producers/ Farmers' Markets	Level of support and interest from farmers' markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Regulation factsheets distributed to 23 farmers' markets with follow-up calls made to key markets •Local organic promotional materials featuring Canada Organic Logo to be distributed to markets to display this growing season
Long-term			
Develop a long-term strategy to encourage the inclusion of local organic products in existing "farm to cafeteria" initiatives, and eventually other possible institutional markets.	Producers/ CÉ D'ICI/ Really Local Harvest Cooperative	Opportunities and partners identified	