



under the oak

The Voice of Organics in the Atlantic / La voix de l'Industrie biologique de l'Atlantique

Issue 9, spring 2003

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On The Fence Post

It seems appropriate that ACORN begins a new year, with a new board of directors, and innovative ideas when spring is also beginning to sprout hope and renewal. Our biggest news this spring is three years of renewed funding from all three provincial governments! We thank the PEIDAF, NBDFAFA, and NSDAF for their continued financial support. ACORN has also started the process of becoming a chapter of COG (Canadian Organic Growers), which is a step to uniting the national organic movement, and increasing COG's ability to influence and change policies affecting organic agriculture in Canada.

As usual at ACORN's annual conference, there was a flurry of networking, interest, and learning. This newsletter includes a conference report including proposed changes for the next conference. After three years of hosting our conferences in urban areas, we will return to our rural roots, and our focus on producers and processors.

ACORN's strategic and business plans, along with the 2003 budget are now up on the website so everyone knows the direction we envision, and what we are trying to accomplish. By early May the website will also feature Organic Farm and Processing Profiles from each Atlantic province. These will also be published in the monthly Atlantic Organic Pages in Farm Focus.

We are currently looking to hire a part-time executive assistant (see details page 2). Given all of the projects we've committed to in the coming year(s), increasing our staff capacity will be invaluable. I will be taking on the new role of Executive Director with energy and enthusiasm.

ACORN is always interested in feedback and suggestions from our members. Indeed, there are a lot of ways for members to contribute to upcoming projects and events.

In the spirit of spring,
Jen Melanson ACORN Executive Director



An organic farmer who recently won the lottery was asked what he intended to do with his fortune. Well he said, I guess I'll just keep farming till it's gone.

President's Message

I would like to welcome everyone to another new year at ACORN. I thank those retiring board members for all their efforts and energy which brought us to where we are today, and welcome the new board members who will take us through the next year(s). And, of course, we must appreciate the continued support from the general membership, and hope that you will answer our call for more active involvement in ACORN with an enthusiastic YES!

One of our more important goals in the next few years is to become more financially self-sufficient. To this end we are embarking on a number of FUNdraising and membership drives. The easiest and most effective way to increase membership is for current members to sign up one new member per year. As for fundraising we are looking into producing a calendar celebrating local, seasonal, organic food- its production, preparation and consumption. We are actively soliciting photos, recipes, organic date highlights, etc... from you, the membership. Please include all relevant info with your submission so that proper credit can be given. We are also looking for sponsors/advertisers and retailers willing to support the project. If it is to be completed this year we must work quickly and you must submit your information ASAP.

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Doug Brown, ACORN President

We are also continuing with our Fall Fairs throughout the region. They were a great success last year and we hope to build on those strengths for this year. One idea is to be able to provide fair patrons with organic fair food. If anyone is interested in assisting in any manner please contact the office.

We are also planning a Potato Symposium for PEI this fall in partnership with other groups. This will be an exciting opportunity for us to show the world that certified organic potatoes can be grown commercially in an economically viable and environmentally sustainable manner.

Some other projects we would like to see the general membership get involved in are a "The Art of Food" and an education module based around

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Updates:

ACORN's Vision

ACORN aims to enhance the viability and growth of the Atlantic Canadian organic agricultural community through a unified regional network

ACORN's Mission

The new mission statement was voted on at our AGM, March 15th

ACORN is a non-profit organization that promotes organic agriculture by:

- Facilitating information exchange between and amongst organization and individuals
- Coordinating informal education for producers through to consumers
- Networking with all interested parties both regionally and nationally

ACORN's New Board of Directors

ACORN would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of board members who fulfilled their terms this past year. These include three members of the executive- Mike Hutton, past secretary, Elaine Thimot, past treasurer, and Clark Phillips, past president. A special thanks to Clark Phillips, who has led ACORN since its inception in 2000. He was instrumental in developing ACORN's policies, process, and by laws.

The new board consists of the following members:

President- Doug Brown (Processor Rep)

Vice President- Fred Dollar (PE Producer Rep)

Treasurer- David Cozac (Retail Rep)

Secretary- Joanne Ubdegrove (NSOGA)

OCIA-NB- Karen Davidge

OCIA-PEI- Raymond Loo (PE)

MCOG- Larry Slipp (NB)

NS Producer- Brian Boates (NS)

NB Producer- Gerry Caissie (NB)

NL Producer- Judy Lien (NL)

Member-at-Large- Av Singh (NS)

Organic Input Project Receives \$7500

ACORN received \$7500 from the PEI Department of Agriculture and Fisheries toward our Organic Input Project. Rob Assels has been hired to complete the project for ACORN by the end of June.

Once complete, members will be able to search an online database under crop production, livestock production, and processing by crop, pest, disease or input, to get detailed technical descriptions of allowable organic inputs, and regional and national

sources for all inputs. This project was first conceived by Rob English, a former ACORN board member, over a year ago, and ACORN is excited to see its fruition.

Please check ACORN's website for updates and information. This database will be a wonderful resource for farmers, processors, retailers and other members of the organic community.

ACORN Organic Calendar

We are in the planning stages of an organic calendar project. We envision a calendar filled with pictures, stories, recipes, and reasons for going and eating organic being sold at retail stores across the region. Please submit pictures, stories and recipes by June 1st to the ACORN office. We want to highlight the uniqueness of each season! We welcome ideas.



President's Message

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the distance most of our food travels and the impact it has on our region. The first idea could take the form of a travelling multi-media show-from live performance (chef's demo) to watercolours. Or it could feature a more local bias by staging 3-4 separate shows in each province. The overall concept is to bring some of the culture back into agriculture.

The second idea is to highlight the many different ways our food choices affect us individually and as a society. Students could do an exercise where they calculate how far their food has travelled and transfer that info into atmospheric carbon load, worker's rights in less developed nations, processing of food, etc.... If we can successfully do this it will help create a much more aware young generation with respect to local food issues. Anyone interested in flushing these ideas out further in any manner please contact the office or me.

We are expecting great things to happen in the next few years and hope that you will help us in taking ACORN forward.

Doug Brown,
ACORN President

Apprenticeship Program Provides valuable hands-on experience and influx of energy and Ideas !

As you know ACORN has partnered with SOIL (Stewards of Irreplaceable Land) in BC to promote their national Farm Apprenticeship Program, in order to address the labour needs of farmers and processors in the Atlantic region, and to help young aspiring farmers learn valuable farming and processing skills. If you are certified, a farmer application has been included with this newsletter. If you are not certified, and interested in SOIL, please see ACORN's website for

an apprenticeship can provide a valuable hands-on learning opportunity for anyone wishing to pursue an agricultural career or simply to acquire a few basic skills

more details. Over the next few weeks, ACORN will be promoting this program to potential apprentices through ads in local papers, our website, and emails to specific youth and environmental groups throughout the Atlantic region. For only \$20 a year to join SOIL, you will be connected to potential apprentices.

As SOIL states in their introduction letter, "In the process of bringing people from urban and rural

Inspector Training

ACORN responded to a call from two of the region's certifying bodies to address the alarming need for organic inspectors. We coordinated a regional organic inspector training course in March with 11 participants. The course was created and facilitated by Brian Ives and Paul Muto, both IOIA (Independent Organic Inspectors Association), trained inspectors. You may encounter participants from the course during inspection season this year, as they complete apprentice inspections around the region.

ACORN will also be supporting several individuals to attend an IOIA training in Maine in June to further address the inspector gap. We believe this is an important use of our resources, and will look at coordinating additional inspector training based on the needs of this region.

backgrounds together there is an exchange of experiences and perhaps, understanding. In addition to offering exposure to a farm lifestyle, an apprenticeship can provide a valuable hands-on learning opportunity for anyone wishing to pursue an agricultural career or simply to acquire a few basic skills. In turn farmers and farm communities have the potential to benefit greatly from the influx of new ideas, energy and enthusiasm that apprentices often bring. This exchange can only serve to further encourage the growth of a truly sustainable agriculture

ACORN's 2003 Organic Resource Directory

1000 copies of ACORN's second Organic Resource Directory have been published!! The directory features a listing of certified producers and processors, retailers, suppliers, distributors, government & NGO's, food services, consultants, and media. This directory includes 30% more information than last years, with an expanded introduction and consumer section. We were able to pay for the majority of the production costs through advertising. Directories are free with ACORN membership, and retail for \$14.95.



Thank you to Randy Mugford of fe publishing for his work on advertising and layout.

This Little Berry Goes to Market

By Alison Dyer



With an abundance of barrens and bogs, Newfoundland is renown for its many berries. One farmer in particular, Donald Howell, president of Island Pond Farms, is striving to have his organic blueberries on palates of more people.

Marjorie Willison receives rave reviews

Feeding Ourselves in the Acadian Bioregion. The environmental cost of importing food to the maritimes.

The conference session held on Saturday morning, "Feeding Ourselves in the Acadian Bioregion", facilitated by Marjorie Willison from the Urban Farm Museum Society received rave reviews from participants. Discussion centred around the challenge of increasing local production and consumption of food. Less than 20% of the food consumed in Nova Scotia (and likely other eastern provinces) comes from within the Maritimes. Most of our food travels long distances, which increases fossil fuel consumption and pollution. Furthermore, all sectors of the conventional food system consume huge amounts of fossil energy. Participants came up with the following ways to increase local production and consumption:

- 1) Develop more methods of food distribution

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The Small Point, Conception Bay farmer started blueberry farming with his brother, Thomas, in 1984. "I was trying to do it part-time, and my brother was doing all the work. It was overwhelming, we needed two of us to go at it full-time in order to get it to the stage where we wanted it to be say in a couple of years," says Donald who quit his job with the Provincial Department of Agriculture to farm full-time in 1994.

Their farm comprises 227 acres of leased Crown land of which they work about 100 acres. These are primarily BMUs, or Blueberry Management Units. That is, lands identified by the Department of Agriculture as having potential for development. "There's already a good shoot concentration there but we try to enhance that," says Donald explaining about pruning and the two-year cycle. "Of that 100 acres, we'll harvest about 60 acres this year. Each year we try to prune 30 acres which gives us a first year crop in two years time." Burning and mowing are the two

common pruning methods used. The rest of their land is a mix. "Forest, barren, cliff, marsh, you name it," says Donald.

The farm produces about 50,000 lbs of blueberries annually and employs an average of twenty pickers and ten plant workers who clean, sort, and freeze or fresh-pack berries in their 1,000 square foot plant.

For Donald, farming organically makes perfect health and environmental sense. He questions the long term residual effect of chemicals in humans. And he is sensitive to farming in a watershed area. "I don't want the possibility of any chemicals leaching into the water supply," he says.

Although the berries have always been grown organically, the farm was not certified until 1998. They were certified, along with a handful of other farms on the Island, with the PEI Chapter of

"Fresh is a lot of work. It's very risky, very labour intensive, very expensive, but we've got no where else to turn," says Donald candidly. "We have to fly our berries out which is very expensive,"

**Donald Howell,
President of Island Pond Farms**

OCIA. As a member of new industry group NOON (Newfoundland Organic Opportunities Network), Donald complied with the organization's recent decision to switch certifying bodies, and is now certified with OCPP. "To weigh one against the other, I really don't know which is better," says Donald. The farm

remains the only organically certified blueberry grower in Newfoundland. And certification has opened up possibilities in both domestic and export markets.

They began by selling frozen berries to processors. One of their frozen markets is Rodrigues Wines, a local company that produces a kosher wine and requires certified organic berries. Donald provides them with about 15,000 lbs blueberries annually.

Still, their main market over the years has been domestic processors of frozen product who do not require certified berries. But with very low prices that were not increasing, Donald and Thomas decided to it was time to diversify. They put in a fresh pack system which now accounts for approximately 30,000 lbs of berries.

The fresh market, in which Donald has both organic and conventional berry buyers, has its own set of challenges. "Fresh is a lot of work. It's very risky, very labour intensive, very expensive, but we've got no where else to turn," says Donald candidly. "We have to fly our berries out which is very expensive," he says explaining the difficulty in competing with the early season abundance of highbush berries from other provinces that are cheaper to produce. "We basically don't have much of a market - except here in St. John's - until most of the berries on the mainland are off the shelves because our prices are much higher."

Donald has also done research further afield, looking into the European and the U.S. markets. In Europe, he says, the market for organics is wide open and prices are good. But the logistics of air travel, including few flights with the necessary capacity and inconsistent schedules, makes these ventures difficult.

For this coming year, Donald is concentrating his efforts on getting fresh berries to the Maritime provinces.

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**Donald Howell,
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he says. "The only way to do that, and we're already talking to other farmers, is to truck berries out of the province which has never been done before. It's a big risk. We have to make sure we have the right equipment, the right truckers, they have to be reefered to keep temperature control, and we have to have enough fresh pack volume to satisfy a volume that the buyers would want in the marketplace."

While that market may be fresh in his mind, Donald is also considering a dried product. Having made some initial contacts, he hopes there will be interest in someone setting up a drier in the province. "Again it comes down to farmers co-operating and having consistent supply. We're trying to work on that angle right now."

Donald expresses some concern about the direction of the newly formed Blueberry Development Corporation that has received \$1.4 million to develop blueberry lands in the province. He

believes most of the money will be used to train farmers to grow berries using conventional chemical methods. For Donald, it's a missed opportunity.

"Once you spray...then going back and being certified organic and getting that pristine image back to the marketplace, it's hard to do," he says.

Rather, he'd like to see Newfoundland designated as a 100 percent natural province. "To try to figure out ways and means and equipment to get our yields up here using natural means," he says. He says the province is one of the last that is maggot-free, and that research suggests Newfoundland berries show very high anti-oxidant counts.

"It's probably utopia," Donald says, but adds "we've got things that could work for us."

Freelance writer Alison Dyer lives in St. John's, Newfoundland



Island Pond Farms blueberry field

A fine balance...organic soil amendments and fertilizers

There are many schools of thought within the organic community on how to maintain soil nutrient balance. Traditionally, the organic farmer was solely reliant on nutrient recycling via plants (e.g., legumes in rotations, cover crops, green manures) and animals (e.g., dung and urine). Today, many organic farmers have specialized into either crop or livestock production and therefore cannot fully benefit from nature's free nutrient recycling services and instead must seek off-farm nutrient sources. Conventional producers often think organic farmers are limited to animal manures as their sole option for off-farm nutrients. In reality, it's quite the opposite. Organic producers may, in fact, be overwhelmed by the nutrient and mineral sources available to them.

Most certifying bodies strongly recommend that the use of composted animal manures, green manures, and crop rotation involving legumes be a first step at maintaining a healthy, biologically active soil. That being said - there are a number of commercially available materials that can complement an existing fertility program. Materials derived from organic wastes or mined minerals are readily available and desirable. Amendments are primarily chosen because they provide particular nutrients that are either deficient in the soil or are in high demand by the crop, however many organic amendments generally contain substantial amounts of other major and minor nutrients as well. Natural nutrient and mineral sources are often considered to have less risk of creating imbalances in the soil ecosystem or of causing pollution by overapplication than synthetic fertilizer sources. The terms fertilizers and soil amendments are often used interchangeably, but a distinction should be made. Generally, when you are applying a material primarily to provide nutrients to a crop it is considered a fertilizer. Alternatively, if the primary intention is to improve soil health then the material is often referred to as a soil amendment, despite having nutrient releasing benefits.

Prior to using organic amendments it is prudent to check with your certifying body the permissibility of any ingredient. Many "natural" products, especially organic by-products and wastes may be restricted because of the presence of heavy metals, antibiotics, or genetically modified organisms. Commercial fertilizer blends are often evaluated by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI-www.omri.org), which publishes a list of generic and brand name materials that are acceptable for organic producers.

Fresh and composted manures vary widely in nutrient analysis, depending on what animal it originated from, what the animal was fed, and how the manure was handled. The list on the following page will not present animal manures, rather it will emphasize alternative nutrient sources.

Nitrogen sources	N-P-K	Comments
Alfalfa meal	5-1-2	Ground-up alfalfa in granular or alletized form also contains trace minerals.
Blood meal	10-0-0	Slaughterhouse by-product containing high N, but prohibited by many certifying bodies.
Feather meal	11-0-0	Steam treated to help it break down more readily.
Fish Emulsion	4-1-1	Used for foliar fertilization, in irrigation systems, and as a root drench for transplants.
Fish meal	5-3-3	By-product of the fish processing industry containing 5%N and significant amounts of P and K.
Guano	15-9-0	Bat or bird excrement, dried and aged, containing significant amounts of calcium as well (may not be accepted by all certifying bodies)
Seafood Meal	4-3-0	Shellfish (crabs, lobster, shrimp) wastes from seafood processing used to improve soil texture and stimulates soil microorganisms that inhibit harmful nematodes.
Soybean meal	7-1-2	By-product of soybean oil production, often used as animal feed.
Phosphorus sources	N-P-K	Comments
Bonemeal	1-11-0	Slaughterhouse by-product containing high amounts of P and almost 24% calcium, but prohibited by many certifying bodies.
Rock phosphate	0-3-0	Slow-releasing, finely ground phosphate containing 32% total P and similar amounts of calcium.
Carbonatite		Spanish River carbonatite is mined from northern Ontario and provides calcium, phosphorus, and potassium.
Calphos	0-3-0	☐ increase pH.
Potassium sources	N-P-K	Comments
Greensand	0-0-7	Iron-potassium silicate is an ocean deposit from seashells and organic matter, containing 7% potash and micronutrients including sulphur, boron, iron, manganese, and zinc. Greensand improves the tilth of heavy soils and increases the water holding capacity of sandy soils.
Kelp meal	2-1-3	D☐ activity and improves soil structure.
Sul-Po-Mag *	0-0-22	(Langbeinite) In addition to 22% K, it also contains 22% sulphur, and 11% magnesium in a highly soluble form.
Potassium sulphate	0-0-50	A naturally occurring mined-mineral with readily available form of K.

Wood ashes	0-1-2	Can range from 2 to 8% K, as well as calcium and other micronutrients. Do not use wood ash from pressure-treated wood. May want to have analysis done to ensure heavy metal content is not too high.
Calcium sources	N-P-K	Comments
Gypsum		Containing 23% available calcium and 18% sulphur will help loosen soils and not affect soil pH.
Limestone		□ magnesium.

*Many of the above materials are from natural sources, but the integrity may be compromised in its processing and therefore may not be permitted under organic standards of certifying bodies.

Much of the information above has been obtained from organic product distributors, standards from varying certifying bodies, and published literature (e.g., Start with the Soil by Grace Gershuny). But knowing what you want to use is only half the problem – finding it is the other half. The Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) in cooperation with organic agriculture specialists, Susan Mackinnon (PEI) and Claude Berthélemé (NB) have initiated a project that will help producers source certified organic amendments as well as provide information on rate of application and elemental analysis. Prior to using any product you should check with your certifying body.

Av Singh, Ph.D., is the Extension Coordinator at the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada and is available for comments or questions by phone at 902.893.6275 or via email at asingh@nsac.ns.ca

ACORN's 2003 Organic Conference and Trade Show Update

ACORN's 2003 Organic Conference and Trade Show was again a successful educational and networking event with over 250 participants from around the region and beyond. The conference committee ambitiously began a number of new conference initiatives this year, including a full children's program, much expanded chef's demonstration, conference session themes, a participatory approach to topics and presenters, and two main dinner meals and keynotes.

As follow up to the ACORN Conference, a number of documents have been placed on our website conference page. These

includede speaker notes for many of the sessions, speaker contacts, and the results from the more than 80 evaluations received. On the conference evaluation we asked the question, "What additional topics would you like to see at future conferences?". Responses included: urban agriculture, health benefits of organics, fruit production, heritage breeds, animal health and nutrition, composting, sharing of techniques, biodynamics, marketing forming co-ops among others.

As a result of these and other verbal comments, ACORN will be making changes to the face of our annual

conference. We aim to hold our next conference in a rural setting, at a lower key facility (i.e. not a major hotel chain). We are planning to follow the MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association) model of a farmer to farmer conference, focused on production, processing, and marketing. We will continue to work to educate consumers about the benefits of organic, but through our Fall Fairs, open farm days, and other events. Though a final decision hasn't been made, we are considering moving the conference to November instead of March. If you have any comments on these changes, please contact the ACORN office.

Majory Willison continued from page 4

more barter more sharing of foods e.g. fruit pickers in cities who pick otherwise unused fruits community kitchens more food co-ops more drop-off places for farm produce

CSA (community-shared agriculture) brokers needed, to link farmers and city folk e.g. grass-roots group in Montreal funded (\$300,000) by Quebec government
 2) Increase diversity of the local foods we eat older grains e.g. Acadian wheat- other heritage varieties edible 'weeds', such as dandelion wild plants agri-forestry i.e. food from the forest local grass-fed beef

(not imported grain-fed beef) keep our ecological footprint small
 3) Increase food for winter farmers need to grow more root crops and winter keepers such as squash multiple preservation methods (freezing, canning, pickling, fermenting, drying greenhouse production using urban heat waste sprouting seeds
 4) Outward-facing communication- we spend a lot of time talking to the converted, doesn't move us forward need to spread the message to others without being preachy people are hungry for

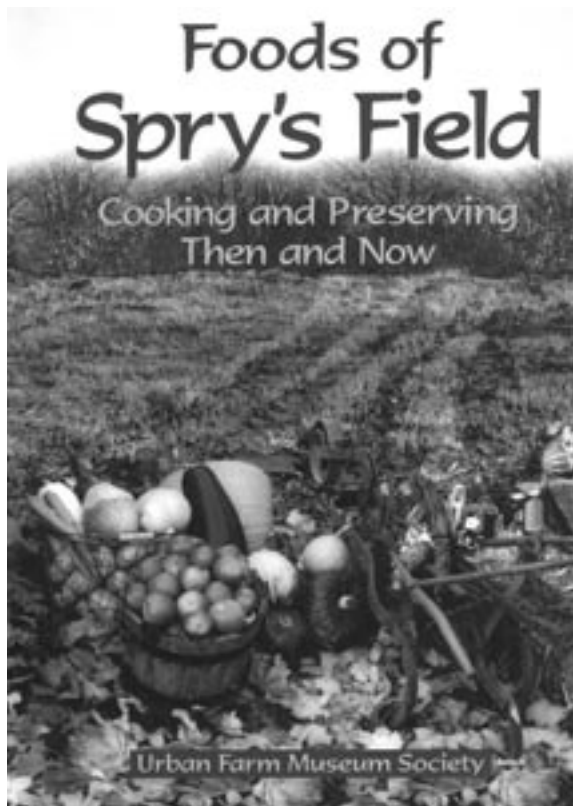
basic information and skills development in all areas related to food (growing, distributing, processing, preserving) examples are gardening, cooking, canning, CSAs schools are a good place to start, children educate their parents; also community kitchen mentoring and passing on of traditional knowledge are invaluable invite people to farms to strengthen town-farm connection e.g. farm feasts
 5) Coordinated action essential need communities, growers, and all government levels to work together

Foods of Spry's Field: Cooking and Preserving, Then and Now

Community spirit in Spryfield, NS, has made the Urban Farm Museum's cookbook a practical guide to eating local foods in season. The Urban Farm Museum Society (UFMS), a grassroots charity committed to urban food production spent two years collecting early and modern recipes based on fruits and vegetables that can be grown locally.

Foods of Spryfield: Cooking and Preserving, Then and now presents a wide range of recipes for home cooks using readily available ingredients. The proceeds from the sale of the cookbooks are going towards increasing food production at the Urban Farm in Spryfield

288 pages, published by Urban Farm Museum Society
Mailed copies \$17 (includes shipping and handling)
Send cheques to:
Urban Farm Museum Society
10 Kidston Road
Halifax, NS, B3R 2J7



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Job Opening ACORN Seeks Executive Assistant

ACORN is seeking an Executive Assistant (EA), for 15-20 hours per week. The EA should have experience with web and database design and maintenance, event organization, coordinating volunteers, and working with non-profits. Desktop publishing and grant application skills will be required. The EA would work from their home anywhere in the Maritimes, using their own computer and fax. A flexible weekly schedule will be based on a monthly action plan. The EA reports to ACORN's Board of Directors by in person meetings and conference calls. The successful candidate would work closely with ACORN's Executive Director. The position would begin May 27th for eleven months, with the possibility to renew.

If interested please forward a resume and cover letter to Jennifer Melanson, ACORN Director of Administration. Deadline for applications- Wednesday, May 14th, 2003

Upcoming Educational Events

June 18-27- Permaculture: Ecological Growing and Living Systems

The Tatamagouche Centre is offering a 10 day intensive course where you will learn and apply the principles of permaculture in the design of ecological human habitats and food production systems. Permaculture is a land use and community building movement which strives for the harmonious integration of human dwellings, microclimate, annual and perennial plants, animals, soils, and water into stable, productive communities. Cost: \$1085 (Includes registration, tuition, accommodation and meals)

To register call: 1-800-218-2220 or email tatacent@tatacentre.ca or visit the website- www.tatacentre.ca

October 3-5, 2003- The Tatamagouche Centre is pleased to participate with ACORN to offer a comprehensive course on the principles and application of organic gardening. Cost \$275 (Fee includes registration, tuition, accommodation, and meals)

To register call: 1-800-218-2220 or email tatacent@tatacentre.ca or visit the website- www.tatacentre.ca

Atlantic Organic Pages

For over a year and a half, ACORN has partnered with OACC and Farm Focus to create monthly Atlantic Organic Pages. In order to continue this service, the pages need to be supported by advertising. Over the next year, ACORN plans to publish farm profiles from each Atlantic province. By highlighting successful and innovative organic operations, we hope to increase the interest in organic agriculture.

For information on advertising, contact Farm Focus- 902-481-8511/ carolm@cameronprint.com