



# ACORN

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network  
Issue 34, Fall 2009

## President's Message:

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ACORN MEMBERS, who are all potential directors, to know how their board works, and so I would like to describe how ACORN's board of directors function and interact with staff.

First, everyone should know that the ACORN board is a policy board, not a working board—nearly all of the actual work of our organization is done by the Executive Director (ED) and her staff. This makes the work of the ACORN board much easier than it could be otherwise.

The board's responsibility to the ACORN membership is to set the direction of the organization and to ensure that progress is made in that direction. We do this through an in-person meeting held in April, soon after the new board is elected at the March Annual General Meeting (AGM). There we brainstorm and set priorities for the ED's workplan and for our own much smaller workplan. The ACORN board doesn't start from scratch each April on the workplans. We structure our brain storming at the April meeting within each of the six categories of the ACORN Strategic Plan. We also have many ongoing projects that in most cases we will want to keep. We ask for suggestions from the ED, and then we

breakdown into small groups to brainstorm and add more suggestions. There may also be items that the board itself needs to work on, and these go on our board workplan. The ED's workplan is, of course, a collaborative effort between the board and the ED. The board cannot reasonably ask for more than can be done with ACORN's limited resources.

The ED creates her workplan from our meeting, and in May we meet by telephone to approve or modify her draft. The ACORN Board's responsibility to our members is to see that progress is made in the directions to which we have agreed. The workplans ensure that we actually revisit our plans and don't just forget about them, but we are always open to revisions as we go along. In a telephone meeting every three months, we review the ED's progress on her workplan, and our own progress on the board workplan. These regular telephone meetings help all of us to remember to get things done.

No one board member, including the President, can direct the ED or her staff—only the board as a whole can do so. The ED's role is to implement the workplans, and we have an excellent and efficient ED in Beth McMahon. Before each AGM, the personnel committee of the

ACORN board meets with the ED and goes through a structured performance review with her on the year's work. This gives her a take-home appraisal of her work each year. The review process allows us to be duly diligent in making sure that our members get the best that they can reasonably expect from our organization. Beth's reviews have always been very positive and I'm sure they will continue to be. In November, if something of importance comes up, the ACORN board will meet in-person. Although presently everything is running smoothly, in order to inform our planning for 2010, this November we plan to do a SWOT analysis of ACORN (identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).

Finally, the out-going board members form the committee to identify potential new board members for nomination at the AGM (note: additional nominations from the floor are always encouraged and welcome). The board also takes time to review and identify any by-law changes that may need to be put forward at the next AGM.

I would encourage any members who would be interested in getting involved with the board to let the ED or a current board member know as soon as possible.

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# The Enticement of Berry Crops

By Rupert Jannasch, ACORN Organic Transition Specialist

AT THE LANDFILL LAST MONTH, A CHAP AT the gatehouse and asked if it was true that raspberries will yield the highest return per acre of any crop in Atlantic Canada. Quite possibly, I said, but only if you enjoy growing, picking and selling the crop and even then there is no guarantee of profit.

Berry crops have an alluring reputation for tantalizing flavour and good health, and I receive a steady stream of inquiries about how a novice farmer should grow them and prosper in the bargain. Management can be tricky, especially managing the various labour peaks throughout the growing season, but great strides have been made in technical aspects of growing organic strawberries, raspberries and highbush blueberries. A broad array of extension material has been produced on these topics. Some of my own experiences growing raspberries and blueberries described below may plug some gaps in the published literature.

## Raspberries

At Ironwood Farm, I planted five varieties of raspberries (early to late) over 800 row feet in the spring of 2006 on a sheltered, north-facing slope after a bare minimum of soil preparation (manure/ summer plowing/oat cover) the previous year. First year growth was miserable and the first expected production year (2007) yielded almost no fruit. I think a preceding deep-rooting crop of alfalfa or sweet clover would have been very helpful to properly prepare the soil.

Nonetheless, the canes have always appeared healthy and each year they have gradually increased in size. A fungal-based compost made from fish and wood waste is applied each spring and seaweed extract is sprayed up to five times before harvest each summer. Take note that regular foliar spraying can be an extremely time consuming chore, especially when the plantation size is just below that which would warrant a field-scale sprayer.

In Year 3, we harvested 750 pints and this past summer the yield was 1050 pints. The yields are modest overall, but it is noteworthy that pests and diseases have been almost entirely absent. Although I anticipate problems to accumulate in what is a long-term, perennial stand,

I can speculate that, so far, good plant health is attributable to the following:

- Fertile soil based on good drainage, good quality compost, balanced nutrients, foliar sprays and avoiding excessive nitrogen-based fertilizer;
- Vigorous pruning of dead wood and spindly fruiting canes each spring, and keeping growth confined to a narrow strip at the base of each row;
- A wide, 12 foot spacing between rows;
- A modest amount of hand weeding and maintenance of a 6 inch "weed free" strip on row borders to prevent encroachment by persistent grasses and white clover.

Probably the most important decision anyone considering raspberries must make is how to pick and sell the crop. Most people know that raspberries ripen fast and grow moldy even faster, and getting the berries to market without an array of chemical life preservers is extremely challenging.

In my case, with a relatively small plantation, I spread my risk between fresh market, U-pick and frozen fruit. Berries that can be picked in the morning of the delivery day are sold fresh. The next preference is for U-pick berries because I avoid labour costs and issues related to post-harvest handling. That said, I never advertise because I always want to recognize the people in my door yard. This creates a tricky balance between having too many and not enough pickers. Nonetheless, as the list of satisfied pickers grows, the proportion of berries picked by U-pick (in contrast to those frozen) grows each year.

Dealing with the public is not for everyone and time must be allocated to supervision, even in the parking area. For example, the unsettling calm after one young hellion loudly refused to leave his mother's car proved to be because he was quietly lofting raspberries into the front seat of my partner's car. Heather would regrettably find this out the next day after settling in for a drive to Wolfville.

Lastly, any berries that can't be sold fresh must be frozen. In reality, this means picking at all hours of the day or night during spare time between other jobs. Filling bags with berries frozen separately on trays is not particularly cost effective but, up to a point, it can be a socially acceptable way of sharing a rushed cup of tea.

All in all, raspberries on my farm work because the plantation is small and manageable, fruit quality is high, and very little fruit is wasted. It appears essential to have a variety of market outlets without relying completely on U-pick or the fresh market.

## Highbush Blueberries

Establishing highbush blueberry plants entails somewhat more risk than raspberries because the planting stock is more expensive and the crop takes longer to bear fruit. No fruit is picked for the first few years and only by about year seven is the plant in full production. Meanwhile, there are pruning, weeding, mulching and fertilizing costs, among other expenses.

Granted, with a potential yield between four and ten pounds per plant, investing for the long-term can be lucrative. The trouble is the discovery some years ago that dark fleshed berries are extremely healthy meant that growers the world over decided to cash in. Thousands of acres were planted in South Africa, South America, as well as in North America. Because of the long lag period between planting and full production, the market is only now just beginning to absorb the huge harvests from these regions. In the words of one blueberry expert, "the freezers are already full," so caution is in order when considering new plantings. This holds equally true for organic berries because arid climates in Argentina and Chili (to say nothing of lenient production standards) make organic production relatively easy compared to Atlantic Canada.

Another issue may be finding suitable mulch. Sawdust is in short supply, as are pine needles. I plan to experiment with a compost made from sawdust and horse manure, but fear this mixture will add too much fertility over the long-term.

Perhaps the most important management tip, that I have yet to learn, is not to forget that each blueberry plant can yield between \$15 and \$30 dollars worth of fruit. Although they appear to grow quite well with little intervention, timely pruning, weed control, foliar sprays and fertility management are essential to maximizing yields. I sometimes wonder how much better the blueberries would fare if I were not running a mixed farming operation on the side.

Do you have questions about organic certification? Rupert's consultation services are free, call: 902-633-2358 or email: [rjannasch@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:rjannasch@ns.sympatico.ca)

# YWCA Youth Eco-Internships:

ACORN HAS TWO NEW EMPLOYEES— Education & Outreach Coordinator Rosemary Murphy & Technical Project Coordinator Stephanie Kukkonen that we were able to hire through the YWCA Youth Eco-Internship Program. They are both enthusiastic about being more involved with the organic network and ACORN is very excited to have them on board—welcome Rosemary and Stephanie!



## **Rosemary Murphy**

Hello, my name is Rosemary Murphy and I will be interning with ACORN for the next 9 months as the

Education and Outreach Coordinator. I have been interested in organic food and growing for some time, and am very excited about this opportunity to get involved with the organic and sustainable foods movement here in Atlantic Canada. Although my studies were in the arts (I recently completed an MA in Philosophy at UVIC), I have volunteered on farms, worked in greenhouses, and, for a few years, served local and organic food and drinks in a small café I opened in my hometown of Antigonish, NS.

The ACORN projects I'll be focusing on will include the Sustainable Farm Apprenticeship Program (our partner project with SOIL), which helps to link farmers and apprentices and offers wonderful opportunities for both – established farmers can benefit from the additional labour and enthusiasm, while the apprentices can learn directly from the farmer's invaluable experience and their own hands-on involvement. I will also be helping to organize the fall workshop series on on-farm food processing. The development of value-added local food has multiple advantages – it can significantly increase a farm's profitability, increase diversification and help to reduce our area's reliance on imported foods. I will also be helping to coordinate volunteers for ACORN's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Organic Conference and Trade Show this March 4-6<sup>th</sup> in PEI, and helping out in the office with the newsletters and other communications.

I see a lot of opportunities to increase awareness and education around organic methods and

issues by working with rural retailers, making sure our resources are accessible to their customers, and that the retailers themselves are familiar with what is available. Also, I hope we can expand our audience by making use of established local teaching tools, like community radio and rural publications, in conjunction with internet resources like ACORN's blog, youtube videos, and possibly podcasts.

I look forward to becoming much more familiar with the exciting work already being done in the region's sustainable food community, and to learn what is needed to help it continue to grow. I look forward to meeting you over the course of my program!

—Rosemary Murphy



## **Stephanie Kukkonen**

ACORN has hired me, Stephanie Kukkonen, to be their Technical Project Coordinator in the Sackville office for the next nine months. I'm a University of Kings College Bachelor of Journalism with Honours graduate and I have experience in the field, as well as experience working on websites and networking with a number of people.

Aside from regular website updates and keeping on top of general office work, I will be working on various projects to help make ACORN more accessible to the general public and to encourage people to buy locally and organically.

At the beginning of October I started up an ACORN Facebook Fan Page. It's a public page that anybody with a Facebook account can access and become a fan of. Once a person becomes a fan of the page they will receive updates from ACORN, see links to our website and our blog page and gain a better understanding of the benefits of eating locally and organically.

Another major project in the works is updating our Google Maps page. Here, anybody wishing to know where they can access locally grown organic products can find out with a simple click

of a mouse. A map of Atlantic Canada pops up and a number of organic producers and retailers have their very own place and profile within the map. I am hoping to make the map even more accessible by designating which locations are farms, retailers, markets, etc by marking each type with a different symbol. That way, somebody searching for a retailer can click on a store or restaurant symbol and somebody searching for a farm can click on a farm symbol instead of aimlessly clicking their way through blue pins.

I'm hoping to also put some videos on how to plant organically and perhaps some video testimonials from members of ACORN. On the Facebook page, I am hoping that people start discussing and sharing ideas on how to eat locally and organically. Perhaps placing a recipe page and even adding a few pictures of some of the great local and organic food people have come across in their travels.

I look very forward to working at ACORN. Have a safe and happy harvest.

—Stephanie Kukkonen

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# Management of Invasive Alien Species on Organic Farms

By Michelle Fike

ORGANIC FARMERS AND GARDENERS ARE excellent stewards of the land, and are concerned about the issue of biodiversity, both on our own properties and in our shared natural environments. We use biodiversity as an ally when dealing with issues of fertility, pest control, pollination, soil structure, composting, and aesthetics.

However, ecological diversity is increasingly threatened in Atlantic Canada by invasive alien species (IAS), and in fact, these non-native, vigorous plants and pests are considered the second leading threat to biodiversity worldwide. Climate change, globalization of trade, deforestation, and chemical-based agriculture have accelerated both the reach and the spread of IAS around the world. Here at home, our farms are increasingly vulnerable to IA species, and the implications of their continued spread are worth our attention and action.

Invasive alien species are species of plants, mammals, arthropods (insects, mites), and pathogens (bacteria, fungi, viruses, nematodes) that enter a region outside of their natural habitats, quickly establish themselves, and spread in ways that negatively affect native species and/or regional biodiversity. The presence of new food hosts, suitable environmental conditions, and a lack of natural enemies often encourages the invasiveness of these species.

These IA species pose long-term threats to biodiversity and ecosystem stability by out-competing native species and the other organisms that depend on them. They can disrupt ecosystem processes, structures, and function; alter ecosystem hydrology, soil chemistry, food webs, and community succession. IA species can also directly attack native species and, by simplifying ecosystems, make local ecosystems more vulnerable to environmental changes than healthy, complex native communities would be.

Of particular concern to organic farmers and gardeners, invasive alien plants, pests, and pathogens also directly reduce crop yields and forage; damage habitat for pollinators, bees, and beneficial organisms; degrade woodlots;

and reduce the abundant natural diversity that makes our organic farms both beautiful and ecologically robust.

Compounding the issue is the fact that traditional management of IAS has relied heavily on the use of herbicides, pesticides, and other chemical treatments. Part of what makes IA species “invasive” is the fact that they are not easily eradicated by simple hand-pulling or one-time-only removal.

In Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley, where I work, live, and farm, garlic mustard, multiflora rose, glossy buckthorn, common reed, and black knapweed are a few of the particularly concerning IA plant species that are found in abundance on farms, hedgerows, forests, fields, highway corridors, beach zones, and gardens throughout the entire region.

While some research has begun to address the need for sound IAS management on organic farms, this work is in its infancy. In order to make management recommendations to organic farmers based on existing best practices biological, mechanical, and manual/physical practices must be independently evaluated across a consistent set of criteria. Findings in the EU suggest that there is an obvious lack of modern equipment available to practice mechanical weed control that effectively deals with invasive species. Findings in North America suggest that simple tools, timing, monitoring, and knowledge of IAS life cycles may be used with other methods to create an integrated biological management plan for many IA plant species. To date, no consistent set of management recommendations have come from this preliminary work.

The Invasive Species Alliance of Nova Scotia (ISANS) is a multi-jurisdictional stakeholder organization enabling communication and resource sharing amongst the various partners working on IAS management in this province. Our steering committee is made up of representatives of federal and provincial government departments, the non-profit sector, private industry, university researchers, Aboriginal councils, and interested citizens.

There is a similar organization in New Brunswick, as well as an Atlantic IAS Working Group.

ISANS is applying for funding to begin the work of creating IAS management material – based on research, existing knowledge, and best practices strategies – for the organic farming community. We have the opportunity in Atlantic Canada to be leaders in the development of IAS management strategies for the organic farming community here in Canada and beyond, and I am excited to launch this work.

I will be presenting a workshop at the ACORN conference in PEI in March on behalf of ISANS, and look forward to your ideas, questions, and curiosity about dealing with IAS on your own farm, and the work of developing an IAS management strategy for organic farms across Canada. For further information, contact: [michelle.fike@acadiau.ca](mailto:michelle.fike@acadiau.ca)

*Michelle Summer Fike is the Coordinator of the Invasive Species Alliance of Nova Scotia, based at Acadia University, and holds a master’s degree in Environmental Studies from York University. She is also the owner of Pumpkin Moon Farm, producer of certified organic herbs, herbal products, and heirloom seeds since 1992.*

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# What's on the Menu?

By Joni Fleck Andrews & Rosemary Murphy

CHEF CHRIS VELDEN IS A STRONG SUPPORTER of local and organic food and is not afraid to show it. An ACORN member and recent conference attendee, Chris tends a rooftop garden in Halifax and promotes his use of local and organic products on Ryan Duffy's menu. Chris is not just jumping on some haute cuisine bandwagon. Growing up in Germany, his family always cooked with vegetables just plucked from their back yard garden, and 30 years of cooking experience has taught him what good food is and is not. It's simple, he says, "the fresher food is, the more flavour it has."

Chef Chris has serious cooking credentials. A European trained Master Chef, who has worked in Europe, the United States, and Canada, he also spent several years as the Executive Chef and Program Director at the Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts, one of Canada's top culinary schools. While in Vancouver he was exposed to people concerned with sustainable food production and a whole new dimension was added to his understanding of food. Chris took this new thinking a step further and began working as an ambassador with the Ocean Wise program at the Vancouver Aquarium promoting sustainable practices in local and global fisheries. Since his move to Halifax he has continued to lead by

example, and acts as the Ocean Wise Atlantic Canada Representative.

Chef Chris admits that choosing local and organic isn't always the easiest option. Chefs usually don't have time to visit Farmer's Markets so getting the food he wants requires some extra effort. As a result, Chris finds developing good relationships and lots of communication with his farmers and suppliers is essential. While having food delivered is ideal for the busy chef, but can be taxing on the farmers. Chris hopes that as the numbers of chefs buying from farmers continues to increase they can work together with farmers, developing a system to coordinate orders and make delivery more efficient. Communication can also solve more than just distribution issues – if farmers knew in advance what the chefs would buy, they could be better prepared to meet their demands.

Discussions between farmers and chefs can lead chefs to shift their culinary focus to more locally appropriate ingredients, and lead farmers to experiment with new crops. Working collaboratively with other chefs and farmers helps to provide security for both parties, Chris suggests. It helps to ensure that the farmers can sell their produce for a price they are happy with and

helps Chefs access the freshest (and in Chris's mind, the best!) foods possible.

But even with the best communication between farmers and chefs, our increasingly unpredictable weather, coupled with the shorter growing season on Canada's east coast, will affect the availability of produce. This past season, as Chef Chris says, has been particularly rainy, and slowed the growth of many summer crops. However, he feels challenges like these are also opportunities for a chef to be creative. For instance, in the winter months when there are no fresh tomatoes to work with, he looks to the abundance of long-keeping squash as a new starting point to come up with unique, regionally-focused dishes. Going local and organic requires just this sort of shift in attitude for both consumers and producers, he feels. But in becoming more flexible and adaptable in order to eat what is locally available, Chef Chris feels everybody benefits. "Using local ingredients not only increases our knowledge in regards to the taste and the variety of food available but it economically benefits the farmers and helps to strengthen our community."

Chef Chris, no stranger to the classroom, is passionate about the need to educate ourselves, and one another, about the very real differences our food choices make. "Given the state of our planet, teaching students the importance of discovering and working with local, sustainable food is as important as teaching the basics of cooking." Chris's work with Ocean Wise has shown him first hand the difference our choices can make. He believes that if we all could see more clearly the effects of over-fishing on the oceans – the mass extinctions, crumbling eco-systems, and collapsing economies – we would all demand more ethical and sustainable practices. "You can't tell a chef what to do," he says, "but education can lead them in the right direction."

To Chef Chris using local and organic food simply makes the most sense – the benefits completely outweigh the costs. By choosing local and organic, he is not only supporting his local economy and reducing his ecological footprint, he is offering his customers fresher and tastier foods.



# Source Local Marketplace at the ApEx show

## Exhibition Park, Halifax April 18 & 19, 2009

***Do you want to sell to restaurants?***

***Are you interested in building relationships within the Nova Scotia restaurant market?***

ACORN WILL BE SETTING UP A BOOTH AT the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Source Local Marketplace at the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association (CRFA) ApEx trade show. The show will take place April 18 and 19, 2010, at Exhibition Park in Halifax, and we would

love to have strong organic representation. ACORN will host the main booth, but we are inviting certified organic Nova Scotia producers to sign up for time slots to meet with chefs, do product sampling, and make new contacts. This is our chance to help chefs make important connections with organic producers!


### *What is the Local Source Marketplace?*

ApEx is the hospitality industry's trade show for Atlantic Canada, attracting thousands of restaurants and food service professionals. The Source Local Marketplace will be an interactive meeting space for producers and chefs, where producers can showcase their products and speak directly with foodservice buyers. The aim is to encourage dialogue!

There is no cost to participate, but space is limited! If you would like to take part, please let us know before November 15<sup>th</sup>. Don't miss out! If you have further questions or to sign-up, please contact Theresa at: 1-866-322-2676 or email Theresa@acornorganic.org.

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# Marty Mesh – Director of Florida Organic Growers & Agricultural Justice Project

ACORN IS VERY EXCITED TO BE HOSTING Marty Mesh as our keynote speaker for our 2010 – 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference!

Marty has an impressive organic resume. A founding member and executive director of Florida Certified Organic Growers & Consumers, Inc. (FOG) and its organic certification program, Quality Certification Services, Marty is also a board member of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG), Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), a past charter board member of the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), and a past board member of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. But don't get bogged down in the acronyms—Marty is more than the sum of his capitalized letters! He is also a dedicated farmer, father, filmmaker, and an extremely lively and engaging speaker.

One of Mesh's particularly impressive projects has been his ongoing involvement (12 years and counting!) in the development of the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP).

In 1999, several grassroots groups and non-profit organizations (including FOG, and committees for rural advancement and farm-workers) came together with the recognition that organic certification, although a positive step towards a sustainable future, did not directly address the people—farmers or farm workers—who make organic agriculture a real alternative to conventional agribusiness. This, they felt, represented a significant omission since historically, progress



towards social justice has been one of the basic principles of organic agriculture.

Although many of us in Atlantic Canada are familiar with the fair-trade principles and initiatives—an agriculturally based social justice movements focusing on fairer wages for workers in developing countries—one needn't always look so far a field to find farmers who aren't receiving a living wage for their labour. The AJP's goal is to build a model of an alternative food system by creating an economic incentive for social equity and just working conditions through the establishment of a "social justice" food label.

The AJP's vision of this alternative food system is one of vibrant small family farms that provide well-being for the farm family and dignified work for wage laborers. The standards for a "social

justice" label are based on the complementary principles of economic equity for the farmer and just working conditions for the farm-worker, resulting in a win/win/win scenario in which farm workers and farmers—and ultimately, consumers—all benefit.

The immediate goal of the AJP was to create universal social standards for sustainable and organic agriculture; to codify in concrete terms what making a legitimate claim of "social justice" means. AJP partners knew that such a claim would be a powerful tool in the marketplace, and would need to be backed up by strong standards and a reliable verification system.

The AJP aims to set a high bar through social justice labeling that is part of a larger effort to help avoid green washing and exploitation of indigenous people and farm workers. The standards developed by AJP in the U.S. can be adapted for use anywhere in the world. The current version of the AJP standards, Social Stewardship Standards for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture, remains a living document that will be revised and expanded based on the outcomes of the pilot projects and continued stakeholder input.

We're looking forward to introducing Marty to our conference goers, and to hearing a lot more about Marty's experiences with FOG, the Agricultural Justice Project, and as a devoted promoter of organics around the world.

[www.foginfo.org/ajp.php](http://www.foginfo.org/ajp.php)  
[www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/index.html](http://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/index.html)

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## Questions and Answers: Certification of Slaughtering Activities

Dear organic stakeholders,

Since the Canadian Organic Regulations are enforced, the COO has received questions from a number of people on the slaughtering operation of organic livestock. Please note the questions and answers provided by the COO that will be published soon the CFIA website.

**Q: Do slaughterhouses require certification?**

A: The OPR do not require that a slaughterhouse be certified however the slaughtering must be conducted in accordance with CAN/CGSB 32.310.

**Q: What documentation would be required to ensure "Organic Integrity"**

A: The abattoir would require a record keeping system that demonstrates that the organic integrity of the meat is maintained. These records would be shared with the operator/farmer's CB in order to verify for compliance with the Standard. The holder of the organic certificate is responsible for maintaining those records.

Scenarios:

If the slaughter, packaging and labelling are included as part of the organic certification of the final product then the CB would verify

that the slaughtering and the packaging and labelling are done in accordance with the organic Standard. In this case the abattoir would not require a separate certification for the packaging and labelling of the meat.

If the organic certificate only includes the verification of the activities up to the point of the animal being sent to the abattoir then the organic certification does not include the slaughter, packaging and labelling. In this case if the abattoir further packaged or labelled the product then activities conducted at the abattoir would need to be certified.

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