



ACORN
 Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network
 Issue 27, Winter 2008

Happy New Year from the ACORN Office

IT'S BEEN QUITE A WINTER SO FAR! I hope everyone is keeping warm and finding some pleasure in all the snow we've been blessed with.

The ACORN office is now in high gear, working on the many events and projects we've got underway—

We've just got word that our regional workshops on soil have funding, so we'll be starting the first ones during the week of February 12 (see page 8 for details).

The 2008 ACORN Conference is almost here. You'll find the program and registration form in your package. This is also the form for the Organic Grain and Oilseed Symposium. We're very excited about the event and think you'll be too.

ACORN is working with SOIL Apprenticeship Program to bring you "SOIL East". This will allow for greater numbers of farm apprenticeships in Atlantic Canada—something many of you have wanted for quite a long time (see page 3 for details).

We've got many other projects that are just wrapping up, as well as work on the national scene, so make yourself a cup of tea and sit down for a great read ahead!

Wishing you all the best to you and your families for '08,
Beth McMahan

Welcome to our new board members

WELCOME OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS: Gilles Martin (NB-producer), Sean Dunbar (NB-processor), and Angela Patterson (NSOGA). We'd also like to thank our out-going board members for all their wonderful contributions: Tony Grant, Ralph Messinger, and Janet Wallace.

President's Notes

2007 WAS A WRETCHED YEAR FOR conventional livestock farmers, squeezed unbearably between high prices for feed grains, due to the ethanol boom, and low prices for their animals, due to the plummeting US dollar. Conventional farmers, producing outside the supply management system, must always take the price offered and pay the price asked.

We are lucky as organic producers to enjoy a bit of protection from this market turmoil. Mostly, we can negotiate our prices and maybe even set them. This makes organic agriculture one of the brighter spots in Maritime agriculture. We owe our control over prices to the difficult transition faced by new entrants. Growers and processors cannot quickly and easily enter the organic market in response to better profits there.

Organic producers have always been committed to sharing their markets by aiding conventional producers in making this difficult transition. We share our market both because organic production is healthy for consumers, animals, and the environment, and because a larger market is in our own economic self-interest.

In the spirit of sharing the organic market's potential, the ACORN board has adopted a recommendation made by the consultants who wrote our sustainable funding report. We have approached the three provincial governments with a proposal to expand ACORN's role in advising farmers brutalized by conventional markets who are considering entering the organic market. Under the proposal, the three governments will pay a fee to ACORN for providing Atlantic Canadian growers and producers with a set of transition-related services, including a new organic transition specialist, in something like the manner that the NS government pays AgraPoint a fee for providing advisory services in that province.

As things now stand, core funding to ACORN from the three provincial governments will be phased out over the next several years, and without this funding ACORN cannot continue all its current programs. If the three governments accept the new proposal, ACORN's level of funding and level of service provision will not fall, but will instead rise dramatically. Members of the board and the Executive Director have met with government representatives regarding the new proposal, and are feeling optimistic about its success.

Sincerely,
Andrew Kernohan

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Organic Value Chain Roundtable Update

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD CANADA (AAFC), in partnership with industry, has established Value Chain Roundtables for a variety of agricultural sectors. The roundtables bring leaders together from all points of the value chain and governments to build a shared understanding of their competitive position, and consensus on how to improve it with action plans.

The latest roundtable established by AAFC was the Organic Value Chain Roundtable (OVCRT). The inaugural meeting was held in Toronto, December 2006, and since that time there has been two more "big table" meetings.

These in-face meetings are held twice a year, with a great deal of additional work conducted by the four working groups (market development, regulations, research and increasing Canadian capacity) the rest of the time.

The second and third "big tables" were held in Vancouver, April 2007, and Montreal, October 2007. At these meetings, reports from the four working groups (WG) identifying their concerns and progress are a key component.

The WG on Increasing Canadian Capacity has been hard at work. First task completed was addressing existing AAFC programs and compatibility to the organic industry. The general consensus was that existing programs do not exclude organic participation, and can be of assistance to organic stakeholders.

The group has moved on to identify key threats to the organic industry; genetic

engineering, nano technology and bio-fuel production etc. Presentations were also made identifying supply issues and challenges facing processors as well as retailers in the organic value chain.

The WG on Market Development has identified a few key areas to explore. This WG has been working on the public awareness campaign of the Canada Organic Logo with the Canadian Organic Office. A study has been undertaken to identify best selling organic products on Canadian retailer shelves that could be produced and processed in Canada (note: The need for this information was identified by this group because of a strong commitment to the domestic market). The initial stages of development of a branding campaign for Canadian Organics has also begun (not to be confused with the Canada Organic logo).

The WG on Regulations has taken on the contentious issue of organic grains, and supply management via the Canadian Wheat Board. Presentations on the pros and cons have been made to the "big table".

The WG on Innovation and Research has been put in the capable hands of the Expert Committee on Organic Agriculture. The priority list for research and innovation was presented to the roundtable.

The next "big table" will be held this March 5&6, in conjunction with the upcoming ACORN conference (which has resulted in much fun in learning how to pronounce "Memramcook"). A presentation of the OVCRT will be made to delegates during the conference.

For more on the roundtables, visit www.ats.agr.gc.ca/value_chain_roundtables/home_e.htm

Allison Grant has been a member of Atlantic Canada's Organic Community for fifteen years. Currently, she is the coordinator for SeaSpray Atlantic Organic Farmers Cooperative plus many years of experience in retail, marketing and participation with certifying bodies and organic organizations has led to her appointment as a member of the OVCRT. Her participation is funded by AAFC, AFID and ACORN.

"We should all take some comfort in this recognition of the Organic Sector, and look for positive outcomes from this initiative as we all face the challenges of the commodification and globalization of organics."



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Come See Us At Booth #9

ACORN Offers SOIL Apprenticeship Program

ACORN WILL BE WORKING WITH SOIL (Stewards of Irreplaceable Land) to increase apprenticeship opportunities in Atlantic Canada.

“There’s been a continued demand for this type of service for many years,” said Beth McMahon, ACORN Executive Director. “Many of our members want a longer term commitment than what WWOOFing can provide.”

Not wanting to “recreate the wheel”, ACORN approached SOIL to partner. Mary Alice Johnson, who runs the SOIL program from her farm in British Columbia, was very enthusiastic. ACORN will now be leading the program for Atlantic Canada.

ACORN will be applying for funding to update the SOIL handbook to reflect



resources in Atlantic Canada, as well as to promote the program to farms and participants.

A time commitment of eight weeks is expected, but the full growing season

is preferred. Most apprenticeships involve labor in exchange for room, board and the opportunity to learn, although some farms provide a wage or small allowance.

Mary Alice will attend the ACORN Organic Conference to speak about SOIL and provide information on working with apprentices. Former SOIL apprentice and Nova Scotia resident, Yoko Hayakawa, will also provide her thoughts on the program and learning experience.

Interested farms register with the program for a \$30.00 annual fee. Applicants also pay a \$30.00 fee. For more information or for a registration form, you can call ACORN or visit www.acornorganic.org/training.html or www.soilapprenticeships.org.



Truro, December 3, 2007. Dr. Andy Hammermeister, OACC, Beth McMahon, ACORN, and MP Gerald Keddy following the federal government's funding announcement of nearly

\$1.3 million for organic agriculture. \$711,500 is to help the OACC, to better identify research needs and to more effectively communicate research results back to the sector. \$565,900 is being used to develop a national sector organization, the Organic Federation of Canada (OFC), to bring together all players in the industry and raise awareness of the sector and to help with regulatory development.

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ACORN Conference — March 2008



Sarah Hillock

Directions & Reservations for Memramcook Resort

The Memramcook Resort is off the Trans Canada, in between Sackville and Moncton, NB.

If coming from PEI/NS take exit 488 (Chemin du Pont Rouge), take a left at the stop sign and go past Home Hardware, down the hill and past the bridge until you reach the Esso Gas Bar. Turn left on Centrale Street in Memramcook. The Memramcook Resort is at 488 Centrale Street.

If coming from Fredericton/Moncton, take exit 482 and go right on the 106 until you come to the Home Hardware. Take a right and go down the hill and past the bridge until you reach the Esso Gas Bar. Turn left on Centrale Street in Memramcook. The Memramcook Resort is at 488 Centrale Street.

Book your hotel room (\$79/night) by calling 1-800-268-2511. Space is limited. When hotel rooms are booked, residence rooms will open up, with beds for \$25/night.

Organic Seed Production Series at the ACORN Conference

Saturday, March 8, 2008

Role of Seeds in Organic Systems with Jim Gerritsen (ME) and Mary Alice Johnson (BC), Organic Seed Alliance

Getting Started in Organic Seed Production with Tom Stearns, High Mowing Seeds (VT)

Technical Panel on Organic Seed Production with Andrea Berry, Hope Seeds and Perennials (NB), Jim Gerritsen, Wood Prairie Farm (ME), Tom Stearns, High Mowing Seeds (VT), Greg Wingate, Maple Farm (NB).

Many Thanks!

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of our funders and sponsors: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, New Brunswick Agricultural Council, Carrot Cache Foundation, Eco Cert Canada, Speerville Flour Mill, Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, Envirem Technologies, Centre for Systems Integration, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Maritime Certified Organic Growers, and the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture and Aquaculture.

Trade Show—Free Admission!

We've sold out the 2008 Organic Trade Show! Everyone is welcome to attend. Hours are: Thursday, March 6th 1:00pm - 6:30pm; Friday, March 7th 8:00am - 6:30pm; and Saturday, March 8th, 9:30am - 5:00pm.

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Organic Meadow
Agri Organics
Farmasea
Homestead Organics
Atlantic Grains Council
Sequoia Whole Foods and Natural Products
High Mowing Seeds
Canadian Health Food Association
Gaia-Tree I.S./Pinnacle Farms
Fromagerie L'Ancetre Cheese

TIME	EVENT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2008 — ORGANIC GRAINS AND OILSEED FORUM	
6:00 pm — 7:45 pm	Transitioning Information for field crops — Claude Berthélmé, Mark Bernard
8:15 pm — 9:15 pm	Quebec field crop production: interactive farmer discussion — Moderator: Andy Hammermeister
THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008	
9:00 am — 11:30 am	Planting Management, Planning and Rotation — Andy Hammermeister, Ted Zettel
12:45 pm — 2:30 pm	Fertility and Weed Control — Sébastien Angers
3:00 pm — 3:30 pm	Developing organic markets: a systems approach — Andy Hammermeister
3:30 pm — 5:00 pm	Quality and Marketing — Tom Manley , Speerville Flour Mill, oilseed processor rep etc.
THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008 — ACORN CONFERENCE PROGRAM	
7:00 pm — 9:30 pm	Conference Kick-Off. Join Pat Mooney , ETC Group, and Dag Falck , Nature's Path Foods, for their lively talk on "GMO's and nano-technology and the threat to organics". Includes hors d'oeuvres, cash bar, and silent auction.
FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2008	
8:30 am — 10:00 am	Opening reception with talk by Pat Mooney , ETC Group.
10:30 am — 12:00 pm	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Organic milk and cheese-making with Ronald Alary, Les Fromagiers de la Table Ronde (QC) · Technologies for extending the growing season with Eric Vincter, Dubois Agrinovation. · Record-keeping for the organic audit and integrity with Rowena Hopkins and Roxanne Beavers
1:15 pm — 2:30 pm	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Managing forages for optimal pasture and livestock performance with Mike Price, NB Department of Agriculture and Aquaculture, and Herman Mentink, Kipawo Holsteins · Farmer perspective: My season extension strategy with Amy Leblanc, Whitehill Farm (ME). · How to go Organic in the Maritimes with Janet Wallace and Bob Fraser.
3:00 pm — 4:30 pm	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Directed discussion on pastured poultry. Facilitators: Tina Davies, Emmerdale Eden Farm (PEI), and John Duynisveld, Holdanca Farms (NS). · Improving Profitability with Post-Harvest Handling & Storage with Jim Gerritsen, Wood Prairie Farm (ME), Robert Prange, AAFC, and Allison Grant, SeaSpray Atlantic Organic Farmers Co-op. · Directed discussion on mesclun mix. Facilitated by Rowena Hopkins, Amarosia Organic Garden (NB).
7:00 pm	Organic Buffet Dinner and Gerrit Loo Award. Keynote address: "Embracing the Organic Future" with Marc Schurman , Schurman Farm (PEI), winner of the Atlantic Region Outstanding Young Farmer 2006.
SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2008	
7:45 am	ACORN Annual General Meeting Don't miss the Saturday Seed Program on Page 4
9:30 am — 10:30 am	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Developing farm and garden systems with bio-dynamic principles with Charles Hubbard, Shinimicas Rogation Centre (NS). · Local AND Organic: Maritime Food Miles with Marla MacLeod, Ecology Action Centre, and Shannon Herbert, Falls Brook Centre
11:00 am — 12:30 pm	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Herb production and value-added strategies with Amy Leblanc, Whitehill Farm (ME). · Creative financing: growing your organic business with Tom Manley, Homestead Organics
1:30 pm — 3:00 pm	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enhanced growing with beneficial insects and birds with David Blanchard, Dalhousie University and Flying Pond Farm. · Developing your apprenticeship program with Mary Alice Johnson, SOIL Director (BC), and Yoko Hayakawa, SOIL NS.
3:30 pm — 4:45 pm	Wrap-up with Tom Stearns , High Mowing Seeds

“Not to be Missed” Speakers!

ALL OUR SPEAKERS ARE EXTREMELY knowledgeable and well spoken, but we wanted to highlight a few from out of region, who you may never have the chance to hear again:

Ronald Alary (Friday, 10:30am-12:00pm)
In 1983, Ronald, Serge and Fernand Alary joined their father in order to eventually take over the dairy farm in Sainte-Sophie-des-Laurentides. Together, they began a transition program toward biological farming that led to its field certification in 1999 and a dairy producer certificate in 2000. Since 2003, the Alarys have been operating the cheese plant Les Fromagiers de la Table Ronde in order to process a portion of the milk from their farm.

Jim Gerritsen (Friday 3:00pm-4:30pm and Saturday 9:30am-10:30am; 3:00pm-4:30pm)
Jim Gerritsen is President of the Organic Seed Alliance. He and his wife Megan, have also owned/operated Wood Prairie Farm in northern Maine for over thirty years. Wood Prairie Farm is a certified organic farm focused on the production of early generation Maine Certified Seed Potatoes and other storable vegetables. They retail through their mailorder catalog and web business www.woodprairie.com. Additionally, they wholesale to several national seedhouses. They are active in the organic community and Jim has served on the Certification Committee of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) for 20 years. The Gerritsens reside in Bridgewater with their four children.

Mary Alice Johnson (Saturday 9:30am-10:30am; 1:30pm-3:00pm)
For more than two decades, Mary Alice has farmed her 10-acre certified organic farm on Vancouver Island, raising vegetables, herbs, and flowers for a CSA program, 2 farmers' markets, and to restaurants. In 1993, Full Circle Seeds was established, focusing on heritage seed varieties as well as unique seeds from places like Asia and Europe. Mary Alice has also managed the SOIL Apprenticeship program for several years and has welcomed apprentices to the farm for even longer!

Amy LeBlanc (Friday, 1:15pm- 2:30pm, and Saturday, 11:00am-12:30pm)
Long-time organic farmer Amy LeBlanc, of Whitehill Farm in East Wilton, Maine, is passionate about food. Amy grows hundreds of varieties of heirloom tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants an heirloom seedling pre-order catalog. She also grows dozens of varieties of herbs, garlic, and paprika for value-added blends, vinegars, and condiments. True to Eliot Coleman's philosophy, Amy looks for simple, cost-effective, and beneficial methods for season extension.

Pat Mooney (Thursday kick-off and Friday opening reception)
Pat Mooney has no university training, but is widely regarded as an authority on agricultural biodiversity and new technology issues. Since 1977, Pat has been working on the issue of “seeds” and continues to do so through the ETC Group and with strategic partnerships (including Vandana Shiva). Pat Mooney received The Right Livelihood Award (the “Alternative Nobel Prize”) in the Swedish Parliament in 1985. In 1998, Mooney received the Pearson Peace Prize from the Governor General. He also received the American “Giraffe Award” given to people “who stick their necks out”.

Tom Stearns
High Mowing Seeds was founded by owner Tom Stearns in 1996 as a hobby. He began supplying 50 gardeners in the first year—and now supplies thousands of commercial organic growers, as well as tens of thousands of gardeners! High Mowing offers a full line of 100% Certified Organic seeds. At High Mowing Seeds, things are done differently than at other seed companies. While most companies simply buy seeds from large wholesalers, High Mowing grows approximately 40% of its own seed crops. Another 20-40% of its seed comes from growers with whom it directly contracts. The additional 20-40% comes from Certified Organic production companies, with whom High Mowing also works very closely.



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We're Home Grown!

Growing Knowledge about Growing Seed

By Andrea Berry

LESS THAN 1% OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC acreage in the US is planted in certified organic seed. Through my work as an organic inspector with an ear to the organic seed sector, I can safely assume the stats are the same here in Atlantic Canada. Why is this so? Four reasons: 1) Lack of quality. 2) Lack of quantity. 3) Lack of variety. All these factors lead many certified organic producers to take advantage of reason 4) Loophole in organic standards allowing use of non-organic seed under circumstance of commercial unavailability.

Organic seed currently comes predominantly from two different sources – 1) Small-scale farms producing and marketing their own seed, many times specializing in rare and heritage cultivars, and 2) Huge industrial seed production companies with thousands of acres and dollars invested, but just starting to jump on the organic niche market. The former can often supply a variety of quality seed selection, however struggle to ensure the quantities of seed that market gardeners and farmers require. The latter often find they can meet the quantity demand, but do not offer a diverse selection.

Recent expansion in my own organic seed business, Hope Seeds & Perennials (HSP), encouraged me to try and address these issues. What better way than to seek the advice of experts in the field?

In July 2007, my partner and I packed up the car, turned the compost one last time, and headed on a tour of organic seed producers and



companies in Ontario, Vermont and Maine. The intention was to get a better sense of how HSP compares in size, shape and systems to the others out there, and get some inspiration and expert advice on how to proceed. We visited Adrien Emond (Jardins aux Quatre Vents, Edmundston, NB), Gabi and Christian Boettcher (Trachener Biodynamic Farm, Brussels, ON), Bob Wildfong (Everdale Environmental Learning Centre, Seeds of Diversity Canada demonstration gardens, Hillsburg, ON), Karyn Wright (Terra Edibles, Foxboro, ON), Greta Kryger (Greta's Organic Seeds, Ottawa, ON), Tom Stearns (High Mowing Seeds, Wolcott, VT), Will Bonsall (Khandigar Farm, Industry, ME) and Nikos Kavanaugh (Fedco, Unity, ME). All welcomed my inquisitions and forever flashing camera, and were willing to share both their successes and challenges.

What we found, was a wide range in scale and focus of operations and markets: Some companies produced solely for the home gardener market, others were centred on bulk sales to farms and retail stores. One company is structured as a grower co-op "farming out" all of their seed production, while others emphasize the point that they grow and process all of their own seed. It was reassuring to see that some were operating at a scale similar to mine (small acreage, minimal equipment), but inspiring to see the larger companies with multiple acres in seed production and research trials, full-time staff to handle quality control, research, contract growers, seed processing and cleaning, marketing and customer service.

One similarity across the board was each company's dedication to organics. Certification is a necessary part of assuring their growing customer base that their products are responsibly farmed, and gives a key market advantage. Yet at the same time, every person we talked to emphasized the importance of the human connection, making sure that you're close to your growers, staff and customers.

As Tom Stearns of High Mowing Seeds put it, "The organic seed industry is one of the only

remaining industries that still operate on an honest handshake. Invest time and resources in good people, let them know you've got a quality product that they can trust, and you'll rise above the rest".

The July seed tour was essential in building those personal relationships. I now feel part of an informal organic seed company network, often calling on the experts I met, seeking their advice. I have further deepened the mentor connection with Tom Stearns, as I spent the last week in November in Wolcott, interning at High Mowing Seeds. This allowed me to move beyond the initial "guest tour" in July, into the internal workings of the business from large-scale crop production and quality control, to marketing, financial management and business planning.



Many of the lessons I picked up from the tour and week-long internship have already pushed Hope Seeds & Perennials into the next stage. My plans include increasing my own acreage in production, expanding my trials and research gardens, and sourcing more quality organic seed from local producers. Part of this will be done through the Organic Seed Production workshop series at the upcoming ACORN conference in March.

Three consecutive workshops will focus on commercial-scale organic seed production, exposing the possibilities and challenges the organic seed sector offers. For organic producers considering integrating seed production into their operations, you'll want to hear what these speakers – experts in their field – have to say. See page 5 for details.



Crop Rotations for Market Gardeners

WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT our first workshop topic in the "Building the Soil Workshop Series" will be focused on crop rotations. Ann Slater will be coming to the Maritimes to lead this one-day workshop during the week of February 12th.

Topics covered will include the principles of crop rotation, things to consider in a crop rotation, why have a set crop rotation, sample rotations, and cover crops.

Ann helped develop this participatory course for the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO), and as one of EFAO's farmer-facilitators has

taught the workshop numerous times to farmers across Ontario. As a full-time small-scale market gardener (1.5 acres), she understands the critical role that rotations play in soil health, weed/pest management, as well as yield and marketing plans.

Ann is also the president of the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO), Organic Council of Ontario board member, advisory board member of the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, and 2007 Canadian Organic Grower's "Organic Hero".

To read more about how Ann makes her living as a market gardener, check out the

Canadian Organic Grower's profile: www.cog.ca/documents/AnnSlater.pdf
Ann's depth of knowledge on market garden production is extensive and this workshop should not be missed!

Dates and Times:

February 12: Fredericton, 10am-4pm
February 13: Charlottetown, 10am-4pm
February 14: Truro, 10am-4pm
February 15: Kentville, 10am-4pm

Price: \$20 (ACORN member) or \$30 (non-member). Space is limited, so please call 1-866-322-2676 or email Theresa@acornorganic.org to register.

Funding for New Brunswick Stakeholders to Attend ACORN Conference

IF YOU'RE PLANNING ON ATTENDING THE ACORN conference, don't forget that you may qualify for a 50% funding contribution for your conference expenses (registration and travel/accommodation) through the Organic Development Initiative! To apply, visit www.gnb.ca/0027/0017-1-e.asp

Please note, you may also be interested in the Market Development Program, which assists with promotions, advertising, new products etc. www.gnb.ca/0027/MarketGuide.pdf

Notice of Annual General Meetings

THE ATLANTIC CANADIAN ORGANIC Regional Network (ACORN) Co-operative Limited will hold its AGM on Saturday, March 8, at 7:45am. This will take place at the Memramcook Resort (conference location). All members are encouraged to participate. To place an item on the agenda, please contact ACORN no later than Feb. 1, 2008.

The Canadian Organic Growers New Brunswick chapter will hold its AGM on Friday, March 7 (12:15pm) at the ACORN Conference in Memramcook. All COG-NB members are invited.

Call for Volunteers!

WANT TO COME TO THE ACORN Conference? Meet new people? Reduce registration fees?

We've got lots of opportunities to get involved and for every four hours of your time, you qualify for a free day pass!

Jobs available: child care, technical support (helping presenters get their presentations ready), registration desk, door monitor, and note takers for our proceedings.

If you're interested, please contact Theresa at ACORN at 1-866-322-2676 or email Theresa@acornorganic.org.