



ACORN

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network
Issue 36, Spring 2010

ACORN's 10th Anniversary Conference: A Celebratory Success!

By Rupert Jannasch

ACORN'S TENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND trade show attracted about 400 people this year, an excellent turnout considering the wind and snow confounding travellers to Charlottetown that first Thursday in March. The tradeshow, in particular, seemed to spill into the corridors with equipment dealers, greenhouse salesmen and seed suppliers from Ontario, Quebec, Maine and Atlantic Canada.

As always, organic food and drink were in good supply, from banquet to birthday cake! Farmers delivered local specialties to the Rodd kitchens by the bushel basket and mason jar. The cooks and servers deserve great credit for preparing excellent meals from an "unconventional" array of food. Asked whether he enjoyed preparing them, one awestruck cook remarked, "My goodness, but it takes a long time to open all those containers." If only more food-serving establishments would take the trouble to try! Doug Brown performed miracles with hearty breads, muffins and decadent pastries—all baked in Speerville Mill's gleaming, wood-fired oven parked by the hotel's front porch. And at Sean Dunbar's hospitality suite, the night watch passed judgement on liberal quantities of Picaroon's organic beer.

With all the festivities it is easy to forget that people also came to work and learn. Many of the presen-

tations are posted on the ACORN website (www.acornorganic.org). Organizers did an excellent job of avoiding repetition with past conferences.

An entire day dealt with berry production, much of it delivered by the highly competent Drs. Yarbrough and Handley from Maine, who left not a stone unturned in their coverage of blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada pitched in with some research results about black currants collected on behalf of a newly established grower group in Prince Edward Island.

Permaculture was also featured in a series of talks by Ken Taylor and Steve Leroux from Quebec's Green Barn Nursery. They promoted a variety of lesser known fruits and nuts like seaberry, heartnuts and ground cherry that apparently thrive in northern climates with a minimum of care and attention. By way of contrast, Agriculture



and Agri-Food Canada scientist, Dr. Tom Papadopoulos, spoke about the remarkable advances being made in large-scale greenhouse tomato production using peat growing media and organically approved liquid fertilizers.

A noticeable change from previous conferences was the emphasis placed on business skills for farmers. A string of sessions about value added production were presented by marketing guru Gwendolyn Simpson of Alberta's Inspired Market Gardens, organic inspector and producer of organic salves and liniments, Brian Ives, and Steve Owen of the National Research Council. Ms. Simpson's discussion, aptly titled, "Persuading the public to pay more for your food," provided listeners with tools and quite possibly the courage for farmers to ask prices representing the true worth of the food they produce.

Numerous workshops were offered on many other practical aspects of farming—such as composting, weed management, livestock management and fencing. Visiting speakers included Ellen Mallory, a soil specialist from Maine, and Ron Gargas a grass-fed beef producer from Pennsylvania. Home-grown talent included Peter Maxner on fencing, Norbert Kungl and Alison Grant on cold storage,

Continued on page 6

at issue:

WHY CERTIFY?.....	2
GERRIT LOO AWARD	3
WHERE DO ORGANIC STANDARDS COME FROM?	4
ZERO INTERFERENCE	6
NORWEGIAN AGROECOLOGY MSc PROGRAM	7
OCNS IN BRIEF	8

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Why Certify?

Investigating the issues and benefits of certification

By Theresa Richards

WHILE MANY ACORN MEMBERS ARE TRIED, tested and true advocates of certification, there are a significant number of members and stakeholders who question whether certification is the best route for their businesses. As a dedicated organic consumer and a potential organic farmer myself, I wanted to investigate and try to document the main issues that seem to be arising around certification and how they are being handled within the organic community.

The new Organic Products Regulations (OPR) – and the protection it does and does not provide, the paperwork burden involved in maintaining a detailed audit trail, and the cost of certification are all significant considerations for the organic operator. While investigating these issues, I found that many of the concerns producers are having with certification are representative of the benefits of organic products and some of these are actively being dealt with by the organic sector. I hope that the points in this article give you some organic fodder to chew.

The advent of the new national OPR and the Canadian Organic Standards (COS) (as of June 2009), have had some unexpected consequences. While many are delighted that after years of hard work the regulation is finally in place, others feel that it is inadequate in its lack of jurisdiction over intra-provincial organic sales. Without a system to monitor the use of the word “organic” in-province, producers are concerned about consumer confusion and the misuse of the term. However, ACORN members have been active on this issue and in many cases, have already started working on implementing provincial standards.

For example, in New Brunswick (NB), provincial implementation was included as a key strategic action in the NB Organic Strategic Plan. As reported by the Organic Council of Nova Scotia (OCNS), a recent meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. John MacDonnell, indicated government interest in mirroring the national regulation in the province. While some people struggle to understand the implications of the national regulation and decide how it does or does not affect them, others are working hard to create a system that works for intra-provincial trade.

Even with a provincial regulation in place (providing consumer and producer protection by regulating the term “organic” to mean certified organic), the cost of certification is still a critical factor for organic operators. Once again however, we have examples of how this issue is being addressed. Prince Edward Island has a cost-sharing program where the provincial government subsidizes 75% of the certification costs – up to \$750. As a result of this subsidy, from ACORN’s perspective, Prince Edward Island is not experiencing the same drop in certified operations as the other Maritime Provinces. In a similar effort to encourage certification, the New Brunswick Organic Development Initiative covers 70% of the costs of certification for those who are in transition or newly certified. Furthermore, as identified in the New Brunswick Organic Strategic Plan, New Brunswick organic proponents are also hoping to expand that program to implement a cost-sharing system in the province. Now, members of the NB ACORN Committee are setting up

a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Aquaculture, Hon. Ronald Ouellette, to discuss this. Finally, the Organic Council of Nova Scotia’s recent meeting with government also brought the prohibitive cost of certification to the attention of Minister Agriculture Hon. John MacDonnell. Eliminating the cost barrier would encourage more producers to consider the transition to organic production. By removing the cost burden, organic certification is rendered a practice and process rather than an extra price.

As far as the paperwork is concerned, many proponents would argue that a detailed audit trail is an essential part of certification. The audit trail provides traceability, proof that a producer is adhering to the organic standards. What credibility would organic certification have without the audit trail or the third-party inspection for that matter? These qualities differentiate “organic” from all of the many other un-regulated labels now becoming popular with consumers.

But what of the many claims from producers who state that their practices really are organic, but who choose not to certify, either because of the cost or the paperwork for inspection? Tina Davies from Emmerdale Eden Farm pointed out to me that the inspection can be a revealing process.

“More often than not, the organic inspection is helpful,” she says. “I’ve heard of situations where the inspector has picked up on things that farmers really thought they were doing correctly, but which didn’t coincide with the standards.” She pointed out that, “the people who aren’t certifying don’t necessarily know what they’re



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not doing correctly.” This remark reiterates the fact that the inspection process really does make sure that a producer is up-to-date and aware of the standards and best methods, providing assurance and traceability to the general consumer who would not necessarily know if the farm deviated from the standards or not.

Davies further elaborated on her decision to continue with certification although she direct markets, claiming that she really felt that it means the product can be trusted. “I feel that certification is a stamp of approval telling people they can rely on you, especially to those customers who might be tourists or those who don’t yet know you or your farm practices. When you say you’re “certified organic” it’s a guarantee,” says Davies.

And yet, Davies also described a time when a woman outright laughed at her when she told her that she was selling certified organic eggs. “Some people still think it’s a joke.” Davies tends to take scoffs or comments about organic versus “natural” or “free range” as cues to really explain what it means to be organic – how she raises the chicks on organic feed with access to outdoors, and without chemicals or medications. She also takes the opportunity to describe that other labels do not have the guarantee of third-party inspection

to assure that their products really are what they say they are: free from harmful chemicals, sewage sludge, cloned animals, and genetic engineering.

“When you become certified you automatically become part of a community,” Davies explains. And this is a significant benefit of certification that I have witnessed in action countless times at various ACORN events. The organic support network is unparalleled in the agricultural sector. Farmers are eager to share their information including seed sources, tool and machinery investments, growing tips – everything. And more often than not, organic producers are working together instead of trying to undercut one another.

The challenges are plenty for those who have chosen to be certified, but it’s evident that each of the issues come with their own set of benefits—and these benefits are further evolving. After researching for this article, and also through the past several years working with ACORN members, I’m convinced that the best way is certified organic. I recognize that it’s a difficult choice, but I also think that there is so much happening to strengthen and build the organic movement that it’s definitely worth the time and passion I’m willing to invest in it (and I hope you feel the same).

Canadian Organic Standards are now freely available

THE CFIA AND THE CANADA ORGANIC OFFICE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT the CGSB Organic Standards are now available on the CGSB website free of charge.

English: http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html

French: http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-f.html

ACORN’s Local Organic Food Sources

THE CHEF AND HIS STAFF DID A wonderful job creating ALL organic, and local meals for our delegates! ACORN would like to thank everyone who supplied food for the conference meals, and we want to let you know who they were!

As our host province, PEI grew the bulk of our provisions this year. Laura Leigh farm supplied chicken, beef, sausages, onions and dilly beans; Emmerdale Eden Farms stepped up with chicken, eggs and canned tomatoes. We had carrots from Red Soil Organics, brussel sprouts from Reg Phelan, and potatoes from Kentdale Farms. We also enjoyed Gary Clausheide’s blackbeans and carrots, Kelly Cheverie’s strawberries, Margie Loo’s pesto and greens and blackcurrant juice from Nature’s Bounty Farm.

Nova Scotia’s Gilberte Doelle (from the Acadian sunbelt) sent an abundance of fresh greens, Four Season’s Farm brought squash, Just Us! Supplied us with copious amounts of coffee and tea (which helped balance out the Northampton Brewing Co.’s generosity), and New Brunswick’s Speerville Mill provided amazing organic flour and grains – much of which went into Doug Brown’s wonderfully fresh-baked breads and pastries.

Gerrit Loo Award

Ted Wiggins accepts 2010 Gerrit Loo Award



NB organic producer and promoter, Ted Wiggins, receives the Gerrit Loo award for 2010 from Joyce Loo and ACORN president, Andrew Kernohan.

TED WIGGANS HAS CONTRIBUTED significantly to the organic community in the Maritimes over the past twenty years in several areas. First, he was a founding member of the original Maritime certified organic growers coop (MCOG). He served MCOG in a variety of ways for many years, until the move was made to set up Atlantic Certified Organic Coop (ACO) in order to meet the federal regulations, while keeping organic certification in the Maritimes. Ted was an essential player in setting up this new system, and it has taken an enormous amount

of dedication and time on his part, which he generously donated to the cause. In 2008 Ted’s contributions to the agricultural sector were also recognized by Farm Credit Canada’s, where he received the Innovation of the Year Award. In addition to his work with certification agencies, Ted has been a committed organic farmer selling products from his farm Shepherd’s Gardens, in the Fredericton area at one of the most successful farmer’s markets across the country. Ted also sells his products at the St. Andrews seasonal Farmer’s Market. Congratulations Ted!

Where do Organic Standards come from?

[article published first in March-April 2010 issue of *Ecological Farming in Ontario*]

By Hugh Martin

THE BEGINNING OF ORGANIC STANDARDS goes back over 30 years when IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements) wrote one of the first set of standards to determine what organic meant and the methods organic farmers could use. They recognized early there needed to be set of requirements for organic production. It was also important to make it enforceable to prevent fraud and mislabelling of organic products. Certification Bodies (CB) did the enforcement through annual inspections and rigorous paperwork to show traceability and to protect the integrity of the organic system.

The Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) developed the first standards in Ontario in 1985. Ontario was one of the founding chapters in OCIA. In the late eighties and nineties numerous other CBs developed in Ontario and across North America – there were up to 45 CBs in Canada. In 1996, it was recognized that there needed to be a nationally recognized organic standard for Canada and various approaches were reviewed by the organic sector in Canada. Many meetings and related discussions on the Canadian standards led to their approval in 1999 as a voluntary national standard and then in June of 2009 the revised Canadian organic standard was referenced by the new Canadian Organic Products Regulation for import and inter-provincial trade. Exports are usually regulated by the country where they are being sold or as specified by equivalency agreements such as now exists between Canada and U.S. and likely to be with other countries such in Europe in the future. Over 60 countries have implemented national government standards with various types of agreements to permit trade between countries. These are initial steps towards an international equivalency where all organic standards are similar.

National Standards are approved by the Standards Council of Canada and must be written by approved organizations according to specific criteria. The Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB), a federal agency, was contracted to supervise the writing of the 1999 standard. Each revision since then has been written by this process. The CGSB appoints the national Technical Committee for Organic Agriculture from volunteers from the sector. There are both voting and non-voting members of the committee. The voting members must have a balanced membership with representation from each of Producers, Regulators, Users and a General category. There have been approximately 50 voting members and 100 total members for each of the standards revisions cycles. Members represent consumers, small producers, large

producers, processors, commodity boards, academics and provincial and federal government agencies. Members generally represent organizations and are responsible to share and discuss issues with their constituency.

Initially the committee reviewed information from all of the various existing organic standards in Canada – including Québec, BC, OCPP/ProCert, OCIA, as well as the U.S. standard (then a draft version), European standards, IFOAM and Japanese standards and more recently CODEX. Debates were lengthy and after many days of discussions the 1999 standard was approved. Discussion began in 2003 to develop the revised 2006 standard which was then revised in 2008 and 2009 and a meeting this past January will lead to a 2010 standard. Revisions have been funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and in the last round by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The organic standards are available on the internet for free at http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html.

The Canadian Organic Standards actually includes two documents: Part I – General Principles document titled, *Organic Production Systems: General Principles and Management Standards - Canadian General Standards Board* (CAN/CGSB-32.311-2006, Amended October 2008 and December 2009) and Part II – PSL, *Permitted Substances Lists* (CAN/CGSB-32.311-2006, Amended October 2008 and December 2009)

The Standards Revision Process

Each revision includes many changes. At the January 2010 meeting 113 changes were accepted by the committee. These will be forwarded to the broader committee for a full ballot later this spring and included in the 2010 amendment. Changes are often clarifications of clauses that have been found to be confusing. In some cases changes need to be made due to new technological changes. Livestock standards for swine and poultry were reviewed extensively this year as were a number of changes in the PSL (especially for processed foods), which in most cases added substances that were not previously considered. In rare cases there could be a major policy change.

All changes must adhere to the seven “General Principles of Organic Production” as included in the Introduction section of the standards and Section 1.4.1 which lists the “Prohibited Substances, Methods or Ingredients in Organic Production and Handling”. This is the main section that states what cannot be used in organic. In general the standards permit what can be used in organic production.

The working list is always long from previous unresolved issues and newer issues proposed by the sector. These issues are prioritized, reviewed and researched by the working groups. Proposals are then made to the main Technical Committee for approval to forward to a 60-day public comment period and then to a ballot process of all committee members. Successfully balloted changes are then incorporated into the standard. National Standards must be reviewed every 5 years and the organic standard will undergo a major review and possible revision in 2011.

If you wish a clarification or interpretation of the standards, contact your CB first, or the Standards Interpretation Committee at the Canadian Organic Office – Elizabeth Corrigan (corrigan@inspection.gc.ca). Roxanne Beavers is representing ACORN members and certified producers in Atlantic Canada. You can contact Roxanne by e-mail at: roxannebeavers@yahoo.com or call 902-843-2318 to voice you. If anyone wants to comment on the current version of the organic standard, they need to identify their concerns and proposed changes in writing to the Technical Committee by contacting the CGSB – Anne Caron (Anne.Caron@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca) and the Canadian Organic Office - Elizabeth Corrigan.

For more information on the on standards and certification go to:

CGSB www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html.
OFC (Organic Federation of Canada) www.organicfederation.ca/
COG www.cog.ca/about_organics/organic-standards-and-regulations/
OMAFRA www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html#certification

Invitation to review and comment on Amendments to the Canada Organic Standard (COS) is now on:

There are several proposed changes to the COS and everyone is invited to comment by May 21st. www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/prgsrv/stdsdev/nsa/pubrevdoc/pubrevdoc-e.html

The Organic Federation of Canada has created a blog to discuss two issues: the inclusion of parallel production and changes to the grain feed rations for slaughter animals. Slaughter Animals: Organic Grain-forage Rations In Fattening Phase. To read or comment on these issues, visit <http://ofcfc.wordpress.com>

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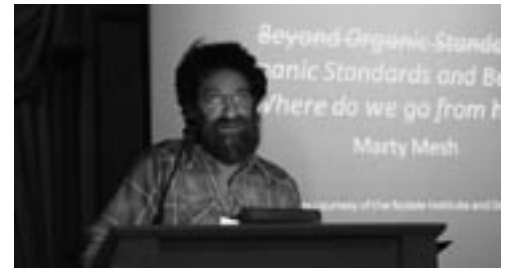
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Canada

Inspiring Keynote Talk – Go with the “FLO”



THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED BY Marty Mesh, a founding member of the Florida Organic Growers and the Agricultural Justice Project. One of our local “pioneer” farmers raved afterwards that “it was the best keynote we’d ever had”. Marty brought us back to what it means to be organic, and how we could move forward to strengthen the organic movement. His conclusion was delivered in a catchy new acronym—FLO: fair, local and organic. In a separate talk, he elaborated on FLO, and spoke in more detail about the Agricultural Justice Project, a program promoting fair trade for farmers. To find out more about the AJP, visit www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org.

**“We had a wonderful time baking for the
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More thoughts on “Zero Interference” from Ken Taylor

“We must remember the reality—farming is a business, not a volunteer service, not just indulging a passion for connecting with the land—these approaches won’t provide you with much in the way of quality of life. They are very difficult to sustain.”

For Ken Taylor, “sustainability” doesn’t just refer to environmentally sound practices, but to a life-style and profitability that can be maintained indefinitely. “If they don’t figure out how to make some money at farming, the back-to-the-landers will eventually have to go back to the cities.”

“Zero Interference” is a very basic, very practical, economically based approach. “It’s not about tree hugging,” Ken insists, “it means growing something without costly inputs.

The idea is to minimize costs and get a marketable product—this is what we have to do to make farming profitable.”

“We do this,” Taylor explains, “by choosing to plant things for which there is a demand—find something different to grow, something not already grown by everyone else, and something you can sell for a good price.” For instance, Ken points out that we import 100% of the table grapes we consume in Canada. This is a \$400-million market upon which one could potentially capitalize to the tune of \$15’000/acre returns.*

The second crucial factor to choose plants and species which require no inputs to grow—no fertilizers, no pest control products, and no excessive labour (in feeding, weeding or pest control). People often forget that labour is one of the most costly inputs we use in farming. Taylor distils the minimal labour ideal in his “plant and pick” mantra.

People won’t (and should not) plant anything unless they can make some money with it. The time is right, Ken feels, for independent growers to try something new and to start making money. Land is cheap, the demand for local and organic food continues to grow. We just need to keep an eye on the bottom line. He isn’t claiming it’s dead easy—it can take time and effort to find the right varieties, and years and years of tweaking and adjusting and refining varieties and farm systems to get things just right. Taylor himself has spent 25 years working on just these sorts of

adjustments and genetic tweaking. And, as those of you who have attended his workshops or read his articles in COG magazine (“Permaculture,” Spring 2009, “Money Does Grow on Trees,” Spring 2010) are well aware, he is more than willing to share what he has learned!

Although Ken is keen to distance himself from the airy-fairy or tree-hugging vibe some people still associate with permaculture, it isn’t a coincidence that this very practical economic approach is also good for our environment. The smartest way to minimize costs is to work with natural processes instead of trying to work against them. Instead of “suppressing the natural systems of evolution,” by using chemical inputs, mechanical labour, or even just your own hands, you “allow your soil and your local systems express themselves.”

For instance, Ken says, “To eliminate weeds we put in a cover crop. But what do you choose—Buckwheat? Winter rye? Vetch? We felt the best was to let nature decide—to see what comes up in that plot. We got a crop of 6 ft high green manure that included amaranth, lambsquarters, a great variety comes up.” Zero interference is also about learning to stop trying to control everything—weeds, soil nutrients, etc. There are complex symbiotic relationships between soil and nutrients and plants that we’re just beginning to understand. “We must get out of [trying to control everything],” Ken states “let your own local soil, your garden plot evolve into its own system.”

But again – there are careful decisions to be made – you must choose a crop that matches the zero interference approach (is hardy, disease resistant, won’t require heavy fertilization, etc.) and that you can sell for a good profit. If there is no market for it, it is not going to do you any good. Sometimes a slight shift in your production is all it will take – start growing table grapes instead of wine grapes, or apple-pears (actually asian pears) instead of apples. The varieties Ken has experimented with are far hardier, far more disease resistant, and in high demand! Ken and his partner Steve have estimated \$300’000/year could be made on 3000 asian-pear trees.* Or try a variety of non-suckering, shade tolerant, black raspberries instead of red raspberries. Or if you’re ready for a more drastic change of direction replace your labour-intensive, annual field crops with permanent, low-maintenance tree crops.

Although the Zero Interference and Plant and Pick mantras might suggest that Taylor should have a lot of free time on his hands, his schedule is surprisingly busy. Besides getting ready for spring planting and a new season at Greenbarn nurseries, and traveling far and wide to speak about his research and experience, Taylor continues to research and experiment at his Windmill Point Farm. He is currently experimenting with additional permaculture techniques like permanent mulches, and “gilding” or companion planting to take advantage of symbiosis between species. Perhaps this is something we should keep in mind along side the zero interference philosophy—the time freed up by choosing “plant and pick” varieties is best spent on experimenting, tweaking and further refining our own growing systems!

For more information on varieties and techniques as well as projected income/per acre please see Ken Taylor’s articles in COG Magazine, “Permaculture,” Spring 2009, “Money Does Grow on Trees,” Spring 2010.

Continued from page 1

Rowena Hopkins, who led us through the audit trail, and Jamey Coughlin and Roxanne Beavers on the realities of “living the dream.”

ACORN, as the event is fondly called, might best be remembered for the abundance of human ingenuity and perseverance evident in the crowd. On one hand, the conference was kicked off by a panel of organic pioneers from the region including the likes of Stu Fleischaker, founder of Speerville Mill, long time vegetable grower Norbert Kungl, PEI potato grower, and former ACORN President, Fred Dollar, OCIA NB’s Karen Davidge, Gary Ogle from Veseys, and Jeff Moore, the Just-Us Coffee and fair-trade magnate. And a well-deserved tribute was made to Kevin Jeffries, ACORN’s first Executive Director, who helped kick off the conference with a reflective talk on ACORN’s past and accomplishments.

Listening attentively was a considerably younger crowd preparing to become the innovators and entrepreneurs of the future. To be sure, ACORN must be one of the few farming conferences where the “under 40 set” equals or outnumbers the core of existing farmers. Food security will be in good hands with these pioneers of the future.

Nova Scotian graduate explores organic farming and food systems in Norwegian Agroecology MSc Program

By Hana Nelson

DAYS AFTER ARRIVING IN NORWAY FOR THE beginning of my Master's program in Agroecology I found myself with fellow international classmates traveling to an organic farm in central Norway. I had never seen such a diversified farming system. Bente, the wife and unofficial leader of the farm, milked by hand 12 cows and 40 goats twice daily, and then made cheese bi-weekly in their on-site cheese house. All the while her husband organized and managed the 45 hectares of land used for companion cropping, peas, wheat, barley, and oats for feed and cereals that are milled into flour. What an appropriate start to a degree program focused on experiential learning and the ecology of farming systems.

I remember stacking fire-wood when Bente asked why we were studying agroecology, and what that really meant. I was surprised by the questions, if anyone would understand, I thought it would be her. It forced me to think about what I was actually doing. I am in this field to be equipped to holistically examine food systems and how to better manage them to be more environmentally, cultural and socially sustainable. This program is doing its

part to teach me to see the complexities of agriculture- from production, to processing, to marketing, to regulation, and finally to consumption.

During our three-day stay on the farm we did a rapid-analysis to come up with a rich picture of the farming system. We gathered so much information simply working beside the farmers and were able to capture the realities of farm work.

The course focuses on experiential learning theory, especially David Kolb's learning cycle: -start by experiencing a situation and gathering as much information as possible, then conceptualizing agreed upon changes and putting these ideas into practice. To test Kolb's cycle we went to the field again to explore a food system. In another group we went to the west coast fjord region to a community that is participating in a national government initiative, called Økoløft, which aims to increase the public consumption of organic and local food to 15% by 2020. We interviewed key-stakeholders in the food system, local suppliers, businesses, local farmers, restaurateur, hotel owners, the municipal procure-

ment manager, agricultural manager, and our key client - the project supervisor for Økoløft, for whom we were preparing a report.

I experienced first hand the complexities involved in the food production chain, where conditions in the field and at the farm level are dictated by national policies, which determine what suppliers are able to buy, influencing what shows up on the grocery shelves.

To finish, we had the opportunity to give a workshop with key clients to discuss how to get more local and organic food into schools, elder homes and municipal canteens. I felt that we sparked an exchange that will be crucial to achieving meaningful progress in this community.

I encourage interested parties to learn more about the program by investigating the website: <http://www.umb.no/study-options/article/master-of-science-in-agroecology> - it's been a rewarding experience and I look forward to bringing these skills back to the Maritimes!



What a Tasty Conference! By Beth McMahon

ONCE AGAIN, A C O R N managed to put together another all certified organic conference! It's certainly not the easiest thing to do—as

there were more than 25 food/beverage suppliers to wrangle in and pin down—but we do it because it's who we are and what we do.

This year, Theresa Richards was the amazing food organizer. Along with the chef, she designed the menus based on what was available in PEI and then, the Maritimes, and started sourcing six months in advance. Of course, a small amount of food was brought in from "down South" to fill out the menus.

Tackling food for the conference is always a risky business: The hotel is working with the food and menus for the first time, so that is nerve-wracking (and we were lucky that this year's chef didn't need a precise recipe to prepare food). Farmers find that spoilage has taken place the week before the

conference and they no longer have the red cabbage promised to us, or that chickens aren't as large as expected. This year, Pro Organics (our supplier for out of region food) ceased operations in Eastern Canada a couple weeks before the conference and we were left scrambling to find another supplier (Co-op helped us out)! There's also the mish-mash of when and how the food will get delivered to the hotel with enough time to prepare it.

It's an understatement to say that ACORN invests a lot of time and effort into the food. We should also be clear that ACORN doesn't make money on the food at the conference, we just strive to break even. So it can be difficult to take criticism for matters out of our hands too (a couple people in the evaluations didn't believe everything was organic, as there was iceberg lettuce—in fact, it was from Earthbound Organic Farms and even that was a bit of a surprise to us when it arrived from one of our suppliers).

This year conference delegates overwhelmingly praised the food—I even got asked to get recipes for some lunch and supper entrees (and that's how I found out that the chef was improvising). The birthday cake that Dianna Linder created was

nothing short of amazing, and that rhubarb and blackcurrant juice from Joyce Kelly was a real treat. Of course, Speerville's wood-fired oven and Doug Brown's baking skills earned very high accolades—and we certainly hope we'll have them back for next year's conference in New Brunswick.

Thank you to all the hard-work of our many farmer suppliers who made pesto, cut up beans, canned and pickled, boiled over 200 pounds of frozen tomatoes for sauce, and then made special deliveries to the hotel (and back). Thank you to our food donors (JustUs! Coffee Roasters, Organic Meadow, Speerville, Farmer John's Herbs, Soy Hardy, Foxmill oils, and so many more). Thank you to Theresa, thanks to Chef Greggan and hotel for trying something new, and thanks to everyone that came and ate all organic (mostly local).

Next year's conference will be a whole new experience—new hotel, new menu, new farmer suppliers. As always, it will be a lot of work, but we're sure it will be a delicious success. Our organic meals always sell out (we are now at the capacity of the hotel banquet rooms!), so please, make sure to book early and avoid disappointment.



OCNS In Brief...

By Angela Patterson

THE ORGANIC COUNCIL OF NOVA SCOTIA (OCNS) continues to be actively working towards growing the organic sector in Nova Scotia. We have been listening to sector in regards to both the challenges and the opportunities that producers and processors are encountering.

The implementation of the Organic Products Regulation in June 2009 and its lack of jurisdiction over intra-provincial organic trade is one of the biggest challenges for the sector in Nova Scotia. Without a system to regulate the use of the term "organic" there are growing concerns over misuse and misrepresentation of the word organic and the possible loss of consumer confidence over what organic really is. OCNS took the opportunity at a recent meeting with the

Nova Scotia Minister of Agriculture to bring to his attention the importance of having a provincial regulation in place, a concept that was supported by the Minister with a commitment to investigate the possible alternatives. Other topics discussed at this meeting included certification costs, the creation of a dedicated funding program for organics to grow the sector in the province and marketing. OCNS shall continue to pursue these issues in the coming months and to conduct a strategic planning session in the near future to determine a plan to grow organics in Nova Scotia.

The OCNS Annual General Meeting is to be held on April 21, 2010 at the Kentville Research Station, Kentville, Nova Scotia, in the Cornwallis

Room commencing at 7:30 pm. For further information or to confirm your attendance or inquiry about membership please contact info@ocns.ca.



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