

Workshop Title: Organic Standards and Certification

Speaker: Roxanne Beavers M.Sc., P.Ag.

Executive Summary

The basics of organic certification were covered in this introductory session. The presentation began with background information on the Canadian Organic Standards, followed by an overview of how the document is structured. The process of certification was then described, where tips were given on transitioning to organic and how to choose a certifier. Next, the importance of record keeping was highlighted, as this is what separates certified from non-certified producers through the organic plan and audit trail. The steps to certification are expanded upon below.

Detailed Notes

Roxanne is working with ACORN, helping producers to transition into organic farming. She is a certified organic farmer and inspector. She sits on behalf of ACORN on the technical committee that reviews changes to standards.

Due to the fact that the Canada Organic Standards is such a large document, encompassing many different factors, this session focused on the main steps to follow when pursuing certification.

Topics covered included:

- What is the Canadian Organic Standard?
- Getting Certified
- Recordkeeping and the Organic Plan
- Inspection
- Questions

Background

On June 30, 2009, the Organic Product Regulations came into effect, making the Canadian Organic Standards mandatory. Before the Standards it was a voluntary process. The Standards leveled the playing field, allowing everyone to be on the same page. They also help with consumer confusion – the logo that is used now can be easily identified. Further, the Standards make organic standards enforceable and contain rules about how to do labeling.

In 1999 there was a voluntary Canadian organic standard produced via Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB).

The process to implement the Standards was driven by the organic sector, a multi-stakeholder group collaborating and working by consensus decision-making. There is ongoing collaboration to make Standards that work across Canada.

The Standards were last amended in 2011. Recent changes concerned livestock production. The Standards are amended in the attempt to make the process more clear. Parallel production (being able to grow organic and conventional products on the same land) was another change made in 2011. It is now permitted, but requires frequent inspections and record keeping required to occur.

The Standards is a Living document, designed as such to keep up with changes in research and ensure they are up to date. ACORN tries to keep us up to date on what has changed.

The general principles of the document include:

1. Environment
2. Soil fertility
3. Biological diversity
4. Recycle within the enterprise
5. Care for livestock
6. Maintain integrity and vital qualities
7. Rely on renewable resources in locally organized agricultural systems

The Standard provides the practical methods that can help achieve these principles.

The Standards do NOT cover:

- Labeling – this is in the Regulation
- Enforcement – this is up to the Certification Body (and CFIA)
- Specific products – the general categories are in the PSL but it is up to your Certification Body to approve use

In regards to trade, CFIA does not have a direct mandate to enforce the regulations. If you have concern that someone is not producing organic but labeling it that way you can complain to this agency.

Be sure that you are always up to date with guidelines to ensure that your production is in line with the Standards.

Sections of the Standard

- Scope
- Definitions
- Organic Plan
- Specific Requirements:
 - Crops, Livestock, Maple, Honey, Sprouts, Greenhouse, Wild crops
- Preparation and Handling of Organic Products

The Canada Organic Standards is a huge document, but only some sections apply to certain producers.

Permitted Substances List

1. *Crop*
 - Soil Amendments and Crop Nutrition
 - Crop Production Aids and Materials
2. *Livestock*
 - Feed, Feed Additives and Supplements

- Health Care Products and Production Aids
- Limited amount of antibiotics allowed in dairy. Very specific and prescriptive.

3. *Processing*

- Allowed Non-organic Food Additives & Ingredients
- Cleaners, Disinfectants, Sanitizers
- Bleach permitted but must be cleaned carefully.

What is not allowed? (1.4.1)

Synthetic:

- Fertilizers
- Pesticides & wood preservatives
- Growth regulators
- Veterinary drugs
- Processing Aids and Ingredients, Food Additives

Also not allowed:

- Genetic engineering
- Sewage sludge
- Cloned animals
- Nanotechnology
- Ionizing radiation
- Fungicide treated equipment or packaging

Certification Process (Annual process)

- 1) Application to a Certification Body. Fill out application; inspector comes to property (2-3 hour visit).
- 2) Review (is application complete?)
- 3) Inspection goes to review, and then you get certified.
- 4) Review (is operator compliant?)
- 5) Issuance of Certificate

Transition from Conventional to Organic

- There is a 3 years of transition from conventional
- If no prohibited substances are used in last 3 years, then farmers can transition in 1 year
- Apply to CB 15 months before you plan to market crops as organic
- For processing - no transition period required
- For livestock it varies

When choosing a certifier, one must consider the following:

- Structure (cooperative or company)
- Cost
- Location
- Expertise
- Communication (what is their response like)
- Markets (if selling within Canada anyone can do it for you if certified with the Canadian standard. If international, must ensure that they can provide you with certification).
- Whether certification to holds up to other standards (e.g. export)

Also, one should talk to neighbours to see who they have used and why.

Certification Companies: Pro-cert, Eco-cert, Certified Organic OCIA and Atlantic Certified Organic.

Recordkeeping

Recordkeeping is key. It demonstrates that you are following standards and that your Organic Plan is being followed (i.e. you are doing what you said you were going to do). It also enables traceability – from field to fork.

Records should be useful for both your operation and for the certification body. Goal is not to overwhelm farmers with record keeping, but to be useful for farm as well (e.g. rotation history). Keep maps – where did you crop the previous year. Records must be kept for 5 years.

Organic Plan: Different certifying bodies have different requirements. The Organic Plan is a description of what do you do on your farm (e.g. what kind of weed, pest management). It is a description of methods used on farm. Includes transition, preparation, handling, and management practices.

Organic Plan should include:

- Description of the operation – crops, acreage, projected yields
- Field maps and field history
- Rotation plan
- And more!

Traceability & Audit Trail

- You need to be able to trace your product from the field to the fork!
- Must prove that the amount of product produced = product sold
- Area Planted
- Field Activity Log
- Harvest Records
- Purchases, Inventory Records
- Sales Records

Inspectors have been trained by a certifier or International certification body (IOIA). Independent assessor visits farm/operation annually. It compares observations of your operation with requirements of the Standard/PSL. The inspector takes notes and reports back to certification body, which makes the decisions. Inspectors are not supposed to give advice, only reviews production areas and your farm record.

“Staying Organic” – make sure you’re ready when you make the transition. If you want to make a good plan, take time, and get there right.

- Make sure you are ready when you make the transition
- Charge enough to get your organic premium - market your organic advantage
- Ultimate system of assurance - third party certification!
- Set up your records well in the first few years - will save time later on
- Continuous learning

Sales: Charge enough to get your premium – get your money back for your standard.
Market your organic advantage.

- Ultimate system of assurance – 3rd party certification.
- Set up your records well in the 1st few years (save time later).
- Continuous learning – read, talk to neighbours, go to conferences etc.

Resource – Organic Path online. Website you can go through with considerations and risk pricing etc. to see.

Contact a certification body if you want to know more. Or call or talk to Roxanne (her information is on the ACORN website).

Question: With regards to the product names issue – what does the certifier do that the PSL didn't do?

Answer: If you purchase something in a store you have to make sure that the ingredients don't include something that is not allowed in the Standard. Contacting the manufacturer is best option. Also the OMR Y logo is being used in the states. You can also call ACORN or call your certifier. The Canadian certifier logo means it's ok, but it's a fee for service.

**Note: OMR Y logo doesn't make it automatically permissible. If it doesn't have an ingredient list then it's not acceptable.*

Question: It is important to inform the public on the value of organic. I am unsure that majority of consumers have any idea about the organic standards are. How can this be improved?

Answer: ACORN is doing an outreach campaign. Certifiers are running on a limited budget, and outreach is not part of it. Organic producers are better than typical farms at promoting themselves. Participating in community wherever you're selling and trying to explain what your doing is important.

Question: At present you're allowed to bring conventional manure on farms. There is a challenge of finding organic manure.

Answer: When composting manure – it is required to keep records. Composting can degrade things that the animals have been fed. Limit the application of manure 3 months before you are harvesting an edible crop. It is a challenge that there's not enough organic manure; a practical limitation.

Question: Do certification bodies still consider it raw manure?

Answer: You have to follow 3- 4 month rule. You can also get it tested and if it's safe (if everything's been broken down) you can use it.

Question: What are the legal ramifications of lying about your production processes?

Answer: She doesn't know, going to look into it. In the community people normally know you, so it's hard to lie about your practices.

Question: Before you got certified you used the term 'natural'. Are there any Standards on using that term?

Answer: You can use it without any repercussions – people can be untruthful, have to be careful. It doesn't offer any guarantee that a 'natural' product has been produced with integrity (unlike the guarantee that comes with knowing a product is 'certified' organic).

Question: How can we use the organic standard in terms of marketing?

Answer: Within province they don't want you to say 'certified' organic, they think it's confusing. The terminology is affecting farmers. People can say that they're organic when they aren't actually certified, which makes it confusing.

Question: Is composted seaweed okay to sell even though it is not on the permitted substances list?

Answer: Regulation of CFIA covers food and feed products. You can't go through organic certification for inputs. It is a fee for service. You should be able to sell your product and it should be ok. One option is to come up with letter.