

Certification Orientation

Saturday, November 24, 2012

Georgian Room, (9:00am – 4:30pm)

Workshop: Making the Transition – Things to Consider (1:15 – 2:45)

Speakers: **ELIZABETH DACOMBE , ROXANNE BEAVERS (ACORN)**

Elizabeth Dacombe graduated from the University of Guelph with a B.Sc (agr.), Animal Science major in 1981. She has done lots of farming over the years, with sheep production being what she was most involved in. She began working as an organic farm and processing inspector in 1993. She has since done this part-time in the years following. Her full time work for the past eighteen years has been as an educational assistant working with special needs children.

Executive Summary

This session outlines the first steps you need to take to becoming certified organic and considerations for your transition year. The two presenters, both organic inspectors, will answer common questions about transition timing, inputs, forms and records to keep, and how to find a certifier.

Details

Presumptions (Slide 1, 2)

The presumption is that you are transitioning towards certified organic production.

The Canadian Organic Regime (COR) certifies food and feed. Other products might be certifiable under a different program. If an organic product is being sold out of country or out of province, it must be certified, but not within province.

The word organic now assumes certified organic. If you are calling something organic and you are not certified you could be charged under the labeling act if you cannot prove that you are meeting all the requirements of organic.

There are two documents that make up the standards, plus the organic product regulations, which are the legal component of the standards. They are 32.310 Organic Standard (COS) and 32.311 Permitted Substance List (PSL) (allowable input).

Questions to Ask (Slide 3)

Have I thoroughly read the Standards? Have I spoken to Certification Bodies (CBs) to compare costs, applications, etc? Do I have an idea of who my market will be? Why do I want to farm organically?

Why a Transition Period (Slide 4)

The purpose of the transition period is to develop skills and experience and to minimize any carry-over from conventional management of land and livestock.

It takes 36 months to convert from a conventional farm or 12 months if no prohibited materials have been used (for land). You need 15 months between the date of application to the Certifying Body (CB) and the date when you first market your crops.

Are you going to Jump in Slowly or Quickly (Slide 5)

For Split production the crops must be visually distinguishable so you can grow some conventional (i.e. beans) and some organic (i.e. corn).

Parallel production occurs when the same crop is grown organically and conventionally. This is generally not acceptable but there are exceptions.

The suggestion is to start with the closest and most weedy field. Create a buffer strip at least 8 meters or larger if spraying.

Seeds and Planting Stock (Slide 6)

Standard 5.3

When purchasing seeds, you must source organic and locally whenever possible. If you are not able to purchase organic you must be able to provide proof that you attempted i.e. by catalogue or document search for seed from at least 3 or 4 sources.

Non organic perennial planting stock (i.e. strawberries, herbs etc.) must be under organic management for at least one year, prior to harvest of an organic crop.

The cost is not a factor but quality or variety could be. You cannot buy treated seed. You must be able to provide proof of non-GM (genetically modified) status (i.e. get an affidavit from the source). An example would be grain production.

Weeds (Slide 7)

Weeds can be controlled with a good crop rotation, proper use of fertility and the proper and timely use of mechanical control.

Fertility (Slide 8)

Fertility of the soil will be maintained with proper crop rotations, which are varied as much as possible including cover crops. The use of legumes, plough-down crops or deep rooting plants within a multiyear rotation plan

You will need enough of a land base to have a good rotation.

Manure can be obtained from off farm organic sources. When on the farm you must compost manure, otherwise it is considered raw.

If the manure isn't composted, then the Standards require it be added to the soil 90 days for crops above ground and 120 days for crops with edible parts touching the soil. For animal manure the compost must be turned at regular intervals and reach 55 C for 4 days or it must be sent out for testing. Records of this must be kept.

4.2 Compost (32-311) states that it must be demonstrated that no human pathogens reside in the plant base compost

For Off-farm inputs you can refer to ACORN's website. Manure must be from animals that are not kept fully caged or in crates or in the dark. Animals must be able to move around. You must record the source and living conditions of the animals and it is preferred must be purchased from farms not feeding GMO grains.

Tools & Equipment (Slide 9)

The equipment involves more hand-work than conventional. The field crop requires more cultivation and weeding thus lending it self to specialized equipment with different attachments.

Talk to neighbors to source equipment.

Livestock Transition (Slide 10, 11, 12, 13)

Poultry only if hatching your own eggs else must be organically managed from the 2nd day of life.

For offspring to be organic, the mother must be managed organically from beginning of last trimester of gestation.

Dairy animals must be under organic management for 12 months prior to milk being considered organic.

Crops and pasture in the last year of transition can be considered organic if used by livestock on the same farm.

A transitioning herd can be fed 20% non-organic feed in the first 9 months of the transition year.

Non-organic breeding stock is allowed if you are not able to source organic animals. The mother can never be slaughtered but could be sold for breeding.

Processors (Slide 14)

No formal transition period is needed for processors.

They must ensure proof of organic status for ingredients or that they follow the requirements of the standard and PSL. 5% non-organic ingredients are allowable if not available as organic. If the product contains less than 70% organic it cannot be called organic.

They need to use allowed cleaners and have to ensure document and physical traceability. This can be similar to requirements for Food Safety or HACCP i.e. Kitchens certified from Public Health.

Table 8.3 lists products used for cleaning where you do not have to remove i.e. vinegar. Table 8.4 list products used for cleaning but have to remove/rinse i.e. bleach.

Business Plan (Slide 15)

When making up your business plan you may notice that your input costs are lower, but labour costs are higher. Other costs may include purchases of new equipment, allowances for weed control, adapting livestock housing and the direct costs of certification.

Other considerations you will have to plan for, include, how will you mitigate risks as well as where are you going to sell your product.

When making up your plan, you should include a farm map and rotation plan. The process of creating this plan proves you have thought it through. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

Choosing a Certifier (Slide 16)

There are several operating in the Maritimes. Refer to the ACORN website for a list. Some questions you need to ask include cost, structure, whether they have had experience with your type of production. Will you be exporting?

You should check with other organic growers and talk to the Certifiers at the Conference Tradeshow.

ACORN Transition Assistance (Slide 17)

Some of the areas ACORN can help you with include: understanding and interpreting the Canadian Organic Standard and Permitted Substances List, they can provide assistance with developing your organic system plan, completing your organic application as well as prepare you for your inspection. ACORN can also help you with setting up a record-keeping system appropriate for your operation that meets the needs of your certifier and assist with production issues.

Roxanne is there to help you. You can reach her by email: roxanne@acornorganic.org.

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Resources for Transition (Slide 18, 19)

Some resources for transition include Gaining Ground: COG Handbook and The Organic Path: ACORN Website.

You can contact Liz Dacombe at edacombe@gmail.com or Roxanne at Roxanne@acornorganic.org

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