

Certification Orientation

Saturday, November 24, 2012
Georgian Room, (9:00am – 4:30pm)

Workshop: Organic Opportunities

Speaker: BETH McMAHON, Executive Director, Canadian Organic Growers (COG)

Beth also sits on the board of SOIL – Stewards of Irreplaceable Land Apprenticeships, Linking Land and Future Farmers, Canadian Organic Growers editorial board, and the Organic Value-Chain Roundtable

Executive Summary

Organic Opportunities takes a look across Canada (and beyond) at the latest trends in the local organic movement. Through the use of a video interview, we are presented with the thoughts of four of Canada's leading organic growers. This is followed by an open discussion with the recurring theme that Organic Farmers have an incredible and important network to source information and support from.

Detailed Notes

Beth spoke about a tool on the internet called "Interview", which allows you to create your own videos. The following four organic growers shared their thoughts and experiences on the opportunities available to Organic farmers.

David Cohlymer, Sustainable Good Foods Consultant, formally of Cookstown Green's

Opportunity: Become an Expert in Organics as an Alternative food source

David spoke about the world changing with increasing incidents of world hunger, obesity, allergies to food and E coli outbreaks. In response to this, a demand has been created for an alternative food source and people with expert knowledge in this area. David's advice is to learn as much as you can.

David speaks about the considerations one must make when deciding to grow organic including cost of production, managing a profitable business and producing a quality product with some of the following features: density, flavor and shelf life. In order to achieve this, one must build soil so that the soil life is biologically active providing nutrition.

Some other pieces of advice for new farmers is to create a backyard farm first in order to learn from it, invest in walk in refrigeration and never reduce your prices at the end of the day. Instead, give the product away i.e. to the food bank.

The last piece of advice David provided was to prepare a solid business plan.

Kevin Klippenstien, Chair, Organic Farming Institute of British Columbia, Cawston, BC, winner of the 2011 Canadian Outstanding Young Farmers' Award

Opportunity: Sell to Wholesale Markets, in addition to Restaurants and Stores

Kevin Klippenstien, with his wife Annemarie, run Klippers Organic Acres. They started their organic orchard and market garden and now farm, 10 years ago and have since expanded it close to 40 acres. Although their intent was to sell everything they produced at Vancouver-area farmers markets, they have now diversified their operation to include value-added fruit products and summer and winter Community Supported Agriculture box (CSA's) programs allowing them to have year-round income. They also began a gift certificate program, which allows consumers to purchase gift certificates at the beginning of the year and exchange them for produce through the season. In addition they run an on-farm apprenticeship program, providing accommodation and training for up to 10 apprentices/year. They also employ up to eight WWOOF'ers (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) at any given time.

Kevin felt that there was a lack of locally grown organic produce to satisfy the current market. He felt that there was the need to build connections thus opening doors to wholesale markets (as a group) as another opportunity aside from restaurants and stores. He advised a good business plan should be in place before you grow.

Sara Dent, Producer/Coordinator – Young Agrarians, partnership with Farm Folk City Folk, BC

The Young Agrarians are promoters of the new agrarian movement. Young agriculturalists, farmers, urban farmers, market gardeners and their supporters; using the power of media and the internet to build a community that can feed the people of Canada.

In modern day conditions there is a trend towards organics. CSA Coalition

Sara felt you needed to have a central communication with one or two key people to look for market opportunities, allowing the farmer to concentrate on farming.

Global movement

Dan Brisebois, QC, Bio Organic Farmer

Vegetable and Seed Growers

His advice is to apprentice on a farm first, go to conferences and read books. Start small!!!!

Following the video Beth led an open floor discussion on other opportunities and current trends in organic farming. Some of the following topics were covered:

Organics as a Lifestyle

Over the last 20 years the demand side has slowly been pulling organics up. As the need for a healthier lifestyle and more concern for where food is coming from, a demand for more organics increases.

One of the current trends in Maine was the declining average age for farming.

In Sackville 2004 there were no local farmers but now there are lots of farmers and 2 CSA's

Schools & Educating the Community

There is a need to educate the community. The current belief that organics is expensive has discouraged a percentage of the market.

There are Models for sending into schools without loosing profitability.

Provide opportunities on the farm for chefs (in training). The idea is to approach local culinary schools, to encourage them to include in their curriculum some time on the farm for the apprentice chef. This gives the farmer some free labour and helps the chef to increase their knowlege base for sourcing good product

The Internet & Social Media

Beth mentioned that we had an important and incredible network to tap into.

If you cannot be found on the internet, your credibility will go down. Some innovative websites have included slideshows (or webcams) of where the food is growing. People want to know where their food is coming from.

Web 2.0 was mentioned as being good for video. Also mentioned was the application Gingle (company in Moncton) which streams live onto the internet for free.

Beth encouraged the workshop attendees to use social media (twitter, facebook etc) as a method to stay in touch and to share ideas and experiences. It was also a good way to market your product to the widest possible audience.

The best way to get into the media was through social media.

Wholesale Markets

Organization as a community is important as collectively we can provide for wholesale markets. Opportunities for the individual farmer is prohibited (financially and not enough product).

Restaurants and Food Stores

Establish relationships with local chefs and stores to supply them with specialty product. Choose specialty products, which large producers cannot compete or undercut on. One farmer produced peppers and sold them as pepper flakes in 65g jars for \$25.00.

CSA's & the Workplace

CSA's were struggling—with an aging population, the problem had become too much food. ACORN has asked the developing CSA's to stay in touch so that they could collect data.

Other opportunities have emerged since, such as alternating weeks, single shares and selling to the work place. This is the trend in the US south and western Canada. The marketing here is for healthier food and the convenience of having it come to your door (office).

The average CSA is 50 to 60 shares. There is a need to connect the farmer with the workplace.

Value Added & Partnering Up

Offer other organic products with your produce to increase your income.

Speerville Flour Mill's Food club is an example of how you can offer dry goods with your produce.

Opportunities for Farmers with No Land

Av Singh (Perennia-Organic Specialist for NS) suggests that new farmers with out land should approach local churches that own land and offer to farm it.

There are also opportunities to approach residents who own land who may want to lease it. Check out Farm link (Ontario) which contains postings for available farms and land.

Organic Fruit

Currently there is not a lot of organic fruit grown in the Maritimes.

Woodlands

The woodlands on your property would be a good source of mushrooms and maple syrup

Hugo Gardens

Urban growing

Support and Resources

Adapt to local needs and be resilient. Share infrastructures and resources within the community. An example is the Hop Growers association is presently researching a dryer that is good for all.

Continue connections beyond the conference. In Ontario the Ecological Association holds Kitchen Table Meetings which allows the participants to share collectively and plan to get information or answers to various items.

COG (Canadian Organic Growers) has a resource library online. You can also refer to other organic organization websites and Facebook pages for information and resources.

Beth plans to upload the Video Interviews (presented at the beginning of the workshop) on the YouTube channel for COG.

Websites

The Young Agrarians www.youngagrarians.org