

Farm Management

Thursday, November 22nd, 2012
Richmond Room, (9:00am – 5:30pm)

Workshop: Record-Keeping for Better Farm Management

Speakers: ROXANNE BEAVERS, ACORN

Roxanne Beavers works with ACORN to assist growers in transitioning to organic agriculture or growing their existing organic farm in a project funded by the National Research Council. She is ACORN's representative on the technical committee for the Canadian Organic Standards, and has worked as a researcher, an organic inspector and a market gardener. She would love to talk to you over an organic coffee about your farming plans and how you can become certified organic!

Executive Summary

Record keeping can feel like a lot of work, but a good system will pay back your time in dividends – in improved efficiency, productivity, and profitability. This session will outline the requirements you need to meet as an organic producer, go over the types of records you need to keep, and discuss a variety of systems you can use on your farm to save you time and money.

Detailed Notes

Not the sexiest topic and in practice, people who want to produce don't want to spend their time with their nose in the books.

There are a few reasons to focus on record keeping:

1. To assist with farm planning
 - What are my yields? Am I making a profit? What the heck is this plant?
2. Traceability for organic certification.
 - a control that can determine the origin, transfer of ownership, and transportation process of a product.
 - Goal is for the end product to be able to be traced back to a field.
 - Inspectors will look for this.
 - With meat you need to know where the cut came from

Q: How to make record keeping practical for you?

A: It must be through a method that you will use (i.e. paper, calendar, computer)

Different records:

- Sales - receipt, purchase order, delivery or packing slip

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- Product handling - packaging (even if it's larger master packages), storage records, inventory
- Production - harvest record, cleaning records (especially if there is processing on site), processing (even ingredients, etc), slaughter (tough out here because of lack of certified organic slaughter houses)
- Management - field activity log this is what you do - plant, fertilize, etc, rates and dates and pest control, soil and water tests.
- Inputs - fertility inputs, pest control (MSDS sheets), animal health, seed purchase, livestock feed

Please see **Slide 11** for the flow chart for traceability. Traceability also helps you to understand WHAT went wrong when/if something goes wrong (i.e. if something different happened, and ensuring it doesn't happen again).

Field History (Slide 14)

- You should have field names / numbers that correspond to a map
- one management unit is one field
- Show the rotation that you practice

Q: If you're growing mixed veggies on a small field - raised beds?

A: You sometimes have the option to put mixed vegetables. But you probably have a plot plan, and so be prepared to show it off. Obviously things change with plot plans, but you gotta start somewhere.

Seed search

- OCI standard vs Canadian Organic standards are slightly different.
- keep track of what you are purchasing and searching, how you liked it, etc.

With Field History, what else *could* be included? Inspectors like and want to see this.

- Actual and projected yields
- Rates of pest control/compost

Monitoring Records (**Slide 16**); use an activity log/journal. Being specific is much better than being vague in this context.

Standard procedure (Slide 18)

- Do you have repeated activities?
- Create a manual
- This will save time
- Make it easier to train new people/helpers/WWOOFers, etc

When determining crop areas (**Slide 19**), uniform bed sizes make life much easier.

Harvest Records (Slide 20)

- Challenging for mixed operations
- Unit of measure - not just \$ value
- Link this to harvest area - we want to know yield, and where it's going

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- Link to sales records

Market Harvest and Sale Record (*see slide with record template*)

An example of a Computerized Harvest Record is shown on **Slide 22**.

An Annual Summary should also be kept; including units/income/weight (**Slide 23**).

Make sure to compare your gross profit and net profit - it helps you to make planning decisions going forward and with specializing, etc (**Slide 24**).

A new iPhone app “Seed to Harvest” has been developed to help farmers organize. It is a way of recording field activities from seed to harvest (**Slide 27**). There is a free intro version or the full version for \$9.99.

Another useful tool is Ag Squared for crop planning, management and harvest. It enables you to create daily and seasonal schedules as well as analyzing profitability. This was designed primarily for market gardeners (**Slide 28**).

On a larger scale, Field Manager Pro is a software from Farm Credit Canada which is smartphone compatible thus allowing you to update records while in the field. Although costs start at \$500, this product uses maps, field history, yield, input tracking as well as performing financial analyses. Many conventional farmers have been using this product (**Slide 29**).

To sum up: keep it simple and intuitive! Use it as an opportunity to *improve* every year. The challenge is matching what is necessary for certification and what is going to be helpful. Standardization helps to make record keeping less annoying. Records have value for you first; hopefully folks can find that value.