

Canada Organic Initiative Project

Progress Report for June 2006

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Summary of Activities

I worked on labelling issues for the organic regulation. I responded to the draft Quality Management System manual. I participated in a Canadian Organic Regulation Council teleconference and worked on incorporation and other procedures for the Council. I was a witness at the trial of the class action suit—Olera Organic Farms vs. the BC Egg Marketing Board.

Canada Organic Standard

Manon Forget, of the Canadian General Standards Board has informed me that the standard (and PSL) have been provided to the Standards Council of Canada for their approval. Once (if) the SCC provides their approval, the standard becomes an official standard for Canada and is then published. Until that happens, Manon refuses to provide me with the finished standard (she's very precise about protocol) though I have the latest draft if anyone has particular questions. The SCC has informed me that their process for approval of a standard may take three to four weeks.

The application for funding the process to undertake the future work list (quite large) has been presented to the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food fund. The Canadian Organic Growers and the Organic Trade Association are applying for this funding on behalf of the Canadian organic industry. If the grant is approved, the money will be used to undertake a new process (in conjunction with the CGSB) to review specific portions of the standard (according to the future work list).

The notion is that CGSB technical committee members will vote on each amendment, not on the standard in its entirety. This way, a committee member may vote no to a change to buffer zones, but vote yes to a change to manure handling, for example. Laura Telford (COG executive director) and Mike Leclair (AAFC) met with the CGSB last week to discuss the details of the new process. Issues for the organic industry continue to centre on the make-up of the technical committee (chosen by the CGSB) and the lethargic pace of the present process.

The Canada Organic Initiative Project is sponsored by the Organic Sector Development Program (Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada/BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands) and generous financial support from Atlantic Canada Organic Region Network, Canada Organic Growers, Capers Community Markets, Cawston Cold Storage, Certified Organic Associations of BC, Going Organic Alberta, Independent Organic Inspectors Association, Natures Path Foods, Organic Meadow, Organic Producers Assoc. of Manitoba, Organic Trade Assoc. PEI Organic Growers, Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, SunOpta Inc, Tomas Nimmo.

Quality Management Systems Manual

The review committee for the Quality Management Systems Manual (the manual will be used to manage the organic regime in Canada) met in Ottawa on June 12, 13th. I did not attend, but colleagues in the organic community (notably Stephanie Wells) did attend and did provide valuable input into this important document. The National Organic Office will use the feedback from the review committee to amend the document in preparation for wider consultation. Marie-France intends to circulate the QMS manual for public comment at some point. The amending process should take up most of the summer.

Not having time to develop a uniform response to the draft manual, I provided my individual comments. My main concerns (echoed by most of the review committee) are the expensive and burdensome process proposed for recognition (by the Canadian Organic Office) of accreditation bodies—the procedure resembles another level of accreditation, but I believe it will not remain this way. The other major issue is the structure of the industry advisory council, which is different from the make-up of the Canadian Organic Regulation Council—we propose that the QMS should recognise the industry-developed council. Also important to BC is that risk analysis for certification should be included in the certification criteria. This process (in place in BC) allows for low-risk operations to be inspected every three years, instead of once a year.

Organic Regulation

Being perpetually optimistic, it has taken me a while to realise that we will not have a pre-published regulation this summer. Parliament has recessed (cabinet committee approval is required) and will not convene until the fall. However, work on the regulation is continuing and I spent a few hours working with Mike Leclair on the labelling language. To continue in an optimistic tone, perhaps it is a good thing that the regulation is delayed, as it gives the industry more time to formulate our position and to provide our views to government. Everyone is committed to having a regulation published this year.

Though difficult to accomplish, it is more important to have our views incorporated into the regulation before it is published, rather than to comment on the pre-published regulation. This is because changes to the regulation after pre-publishing will result in long delays (pre-publishing all over again).

Canadian Organic Regulation Council (CORC)

We have decided on a name for the new council—in French, it is Conseil canadien pour la réglementation biologique (CCRB). I've searched the name and drafted the incorporation papers for application this month. The CORC has been having regular teleconferences and has decided to hold the first annual general meeting during the Organic Connections Conference November 12 in Saskatoon <http://www.organicconnections.ca/> I am also working on drafting policies and procedures for the CORC—once approved, these will describe the rules and guidelines under which the CORC operates.

There is a lot of work for the new organisation and pressure for it to be up-and-running. Danielle and I have made development of the council our top priority.

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Next Steps

I intend to apply for incorporation of the CORC, to finish the draft policies and procedures and work towards a uniform response to the draft QMS manual.

My email address is paddy@quesnelbc.com. This report, along with other ORC documents is archived at <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/programs/coi.htm> . Information from the CFIA Organic Task Force is available at <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/orgbio/otfgtspbe.shtml>

Respectfully submitted,



Paddy Doherty

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