

To Whom it May Concern,

January 31, 2008

We propose the development and implementation of a process of community organic verification by which small farmers and gardeners can become organically certified.

When it began, the organic movement was a means to supply family, friends and neighbours with clean, healthy and nutritious food. It has grown to include multinational corporations and big box retailers moving food thousands of kilometres to markets. This international trade in organically grown food has necessitated the implementation of national standards.

However, for organic growers who are supplying food for local and provincial markets, some of the national requirements for certification will prove unwieldy and costly.

A local, community verified organic program would have several benefits. It would:

1. provide a less expensive alternative for certification.
Certification fees would only support local activities.
2. ensure that farmers can easily adjust to local conditions in the certification process.
3. involve the expertise and resources of universities and colleges in B.C.
Professors and instructors at UBC and University College of the Fraser Valley have already expressed an interest in the process.
4. provide a means to make small gardens certified organic.
Our customers always have questions about organic growing and much of our work is educational – even to helping customers set up their own organic gardens. We have found that when they start an organic garden, they begin to care more about their food and how it is grown and become empowered to act to protect that food supply.
5. enable growers to adapt effectively to changes in local climates.
6. help to retain local control of organic food production and supply and ensure long term food security.

We propose that COABC support a process that would see all stakeholders involved in developing the policies and procedures necessary to establish a community certified organic program.

Outline for Community Verified Organic Certification

The following is meant to support the discussion on how to implement a Community Verified Organic Certification Program.

A. Farm Information

A grower / gardener would provide the following information regarding the farm / garden:

- 1) Address and ownership information including size and legal status etc.
- 2) Previous status and use of the area to be verified including;
 - history of land usage
 - history of crops
 - history of usage of soil amendments
- 3) Farm Map - including adjoining properties that may affect status.

B. Soil Management

- 1) Soil inputs history and planned inputs.
- 2) Soil test results – where applicable.

C. Crop Management

- 1) Types of crops grown and planned
- 2) Planned control methods for weeds, insects, and disease.
- 3) Crop handling – are crops stored on site? Processed?
- 4) Water for irrigation and processing. What is the source? Potential sources of contamination?
- 5) Seeds - use of treated versus untreated seed. Use of organic versus non organic seed. Source of seeds.

D. Regulated Materials

Record of usage of regulated materials as set out by COABC.

E. Community Verification

1. Growers could be divided into 2 groups – small farmers and backyard gardeners.
2. Verification could be carried out by 3 groups of stakeholders
 - a. Peers
 - growers/gardeners who have similar operations
 - b. Agricultural / Horticultural Students Review
 - liason with universities / colleges would determine what prerequisites would be required of the students. These prerequisites could also lead to CFIA Inspector’s Certification.
 - c. Community Review
 - this could be handled through an online website that would permit other stakeholders to comment on practices of growers / gardeners.

F. Variiances

Considering the desirability of reducing the distance travelled from the farm / garden to the consumer and reducing the number of steps between the grower and consumer, a “Board of Variance” could be set up to handle variations in best practices. For example, if a grower has a bumper crop of carrots it might make environmental sense to take a truckload to a wholesaler rather than have hundreds of customers visit the farm.

G. SAFE - Sustainable Agricultural Farming Environment © 2007 - Surrey Organic Farming Society

Operations could strive toward adoption of the following SAFE goals:

1. Farm operation is pesticide, insecticide, herbicide, fungicide, and GMO free (Environmental Footprint).
2. Farm has achieved Environmental Farm Certification through the Provincial / Federal Programme (Environmental Footprint).
3. Farm will maintain soil in a balanced, non-erosion manner utilizing natural occurring soil amendments when necessary. Verification will be through soil testing (Environmental Footprint).
4. Farm will maintain water and irrigation systems in a food safe manner. Verification will be through water testing by Fraser Health Authority (Environmental Footprint).
5. Farm is energy self-sufficient (Carbon Footprint).
6. Farm is vehicle emissions neutral (Carbon Footprint).
7. Farm is operated in compliance with Work Safe Guidelines of WCB (Social Footprint).
8. Farm provides workers with decent work conditions and provides workers with Provincial Minimum Wage standard or higher (Social Footprint).
9. Farm Gate sales are the priority of the Farm operation. Farm receipts for seeds and off farm products will be maintained for verification (Economic Footprint).
10. Farm operation participates in at least one Educational and /or Research activity per year on the Farm or in a classroom (Economic and Social Footprints).

A community verified organic program would, of course, require compliance with national standards. It would involve peers, universities, the B.C. community and other stakeholders in ensuring local responsibility for a clean, safe and nutritious food supply.

This outline is made only as a suggestion to the organic community as to how a community verification program might work.

It is hoped by the writers that this may suggest an outline which will promote discussion by all stakeholders over the next year or so – an “organic” process leading to a community verification program that can be adopted by all.

We look forward to the discussions to come.

Sincerely,

Michael and Linda Steele
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Surrey