

# E-News



August 2010

## WHAT'S NEW

### 2011 COABC Conference "The Next Generation"

The 2011 COABC conference is only 6 months away.

**Sidney on Vancouver Island,  
March 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Keep watch for the Fall Edition of the "BC Organic Grower" for more details.

### "What is Organic Farming?" Booklet now available as pdf

Are you familiar with the green "What is Organic Farming" booklet? If you would like a copy we now have an electronic version as a pdf document. Please contact the office to get your copy. [admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca](mailto:admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca)

### Development of Organic Aquaculture Standards

The Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) in collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and industry players has been developing a draft organic aquaculture standard. The draft document has been posted on the CGSB website as is the comment form. There is a public response period ending August 30, 2010.

There are concerns that the draft standards do not require any significant changes to current fish farm practices to meet the standards and thus allow designation of the product as organic. For further commentary on this read [Living Ocean's Society Blog](#) and [Farmed and Dangerous](#)

See the CGSB website for more information [Organic Aquaculture: Draft standards and comment form](#)

### Summer reading

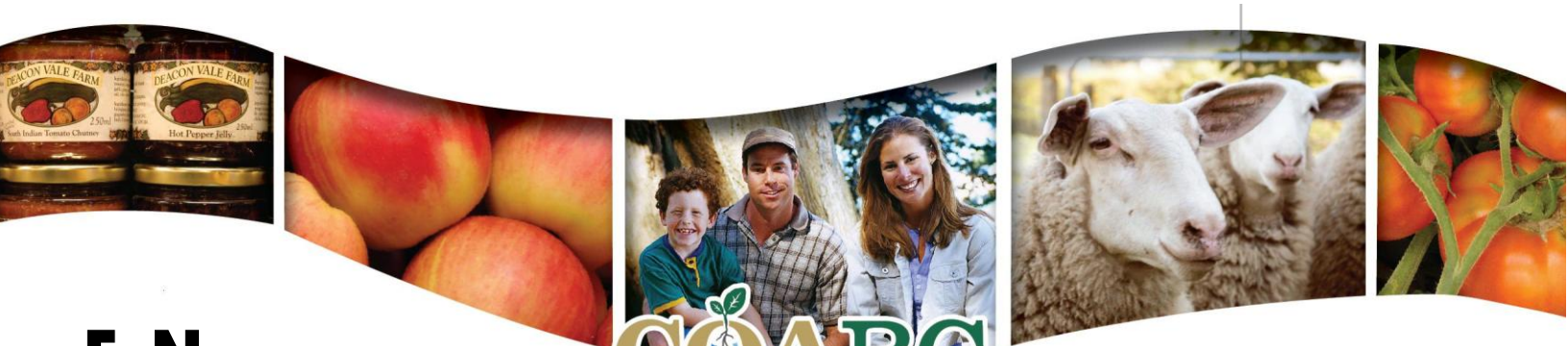
OACC is mandated to disseminate the knowledge and science of organic to the organic stakeholders and has created a series of articles that are easy to read and informative on various aspects of organic farming; it is always interesting to read about the organic approach to tillage, animal welfare, the basic role of insects, or about the deeper organic movement. The articles are short, lively and get right to the point. So have a fresh organic beer or lemonade, relax and click on [http://www.oacc.info/NewspaperArticles/na\\_welcome.asp](http://www.oacc.info/NewspaperArticles/na_welcome.asp) to discover more about the riches of the organic approach.

More Reading: From the Watershed sentential – see the article on Low Greenhouse Gas Agriculture posted on our website. <http://certifiedorganic.bc.ca/infonews/kyi.php>

### Webinars Available on line

The 2010 Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC) Conference Webinars series is now available online! To learn more or to watch these insightful Agriwebinars, [click here](#).

- **Soil Nematodes** with Rosy Smit
- **Breaking Down Market Barriers: Strategies to Improve Markets for Small and Mid-sized Organic Growers** with Alida Cantor
- **Transition Towns** with David Johnson
- **Rethinking Economic Development: Using Standard Tools to Promote a Local Food Economy** with Rob Marqusee



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- **Using Grandin-like Principles in Livestock Production: Small Things Sure Can Make a Difference** with Jane Morigan

## ONGOING

### **Labour Needs Survey on farms with less than \$100,000 in gross receipts**

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is researching the labour needs on farms with less than \$100,000 in gross receipts. Your responses will be used to better understand employment needs of smaller farms and will ensure that operations from British Columbia are represented in the research.

Go to [www.cahrc-ccrha.ca](http://www.cahrc-ccrha.ca) Or call CAHRC at 1-866-430-7457 ext. 228 to complete the survey by phone.

All respondents can enter for a chance to win \$100

**About CAHRC:** The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) was created to address human resource issues facing agricultural businesses across Canada. CAHRC works with industry leaders, governments, and education stakeholders to research, develop and communicate solutions to the challenges in agriculture employment and skills development.

### **BC Certified Organic Checkmark Logo**

The logo of the BC Certified Organic program is a key tool to identify certified organic products in BC. It is important that the symbol is used correctly; here is a quick reminder, especially for websites and the exclusion zone (white space.) The Program Symbol is enclosed by a black border. The border ensures that the appropriate white space or exclusion zone is provided around the composite mark. The Program Symbol must be enclosed by the border if the Symbol is applied against colored or complex backgrounds. However, if the background is white or off-white, it may be desirable to omit the border while ensuring the appropriate exclusion zone.

### **CHC OFFS Manuals**

On Farm Food Safety Manuals are available on the CHC member website.

If you do not have the CHC member password for COABC please contact Kristy at [office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca](mailto:office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca)

### **Complaints Submission Form**

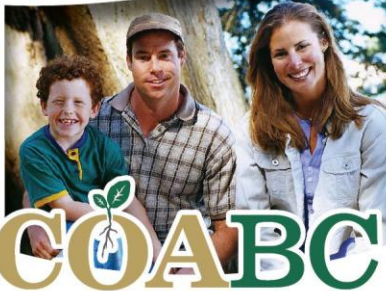
Canada Organic Office complaint submission form can be found at <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/programs/cor.php>

For complaints against an interprovincial traded product see the COO complaint form at

<http://certifiedorganic.bc.ca/programs/cor.php>

Complaints on this form are to be directed to the Canada Organic Office directly [OPR.RPB@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:OPR.RPB@inspection.gc.ca).

### **Reminder – shipping in and out of Province**



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For certified organic operators who wish to ship outside the province (nationally or internationally) don't forget that you now must be certified under under ISO rather than the provincial BC certified organic program.

## INTERESTING

### From "The Scoop" The Organic Centre Newsletter [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org) "Organic Agriculture Promotes Evenness and Natural Pest Control"

Scientists from Washington State University and the University of Georgia have provided the most compelling evidence to date backing up a widely accepted principle of organic farming – in diversity, there is both stability and resiliency. Crowder et al. (2010) studied organic and conventional potato fields in Washington State. They analyzed in several ways the impact of species diversity **and** the evenness of populations on pest control and feeding damage.

By "evenness," they refer to the degree to which any one organism dominates an ecosystem. In conventional potato fields, they found that "just one species accounted for up to 80% of individuals..." while in the organic fields, the dominant species never accounted for more than 38%.

In their field work in Washington State, the higher degree of evenness in the organic potato fields "translates into pest densities 18% lower and plants 35% larger." In a meta-analysis of 38 published studies on predator-prey levels and impacts on yields, the team concluded that "natural enemy evenness increases yield."

Their conclusions are striking and of great significance. After explaining that conventional, pesticide-based control systems disrupt species diversity and tend to create ecological niches filled by a few highly dominate species, the authors conclude that – "...organic farming methods mitigate this ecological damage by promoting evenness among natural enemies....very even communities of predator and pathogen biological control agents, typical of organic farms, exerted the strongest pest control and yielded the largest plants."

And just to drive home the point, *Nature* covered this important paper in an "Applied Ecology" news item that states matter-of-factly – "There is little doubt that organic farms generally support more biodiversity, with a higher abundance and greater species richness of many plant and animal groups." (Turnbull and Hector, 2010)

**Sources:** Crowder, D.W., Northfield, T.D., Strand, M.R., and W.E. Snyder. 2010. "Organic agriculture promotes evenness and natural pest control," *Nature*, Vol. 466: 109-112.

Turnbull, L.A., and A. Hector. 2010. "How to get even with pests," *Nature*, Vol. 466: 36-37.

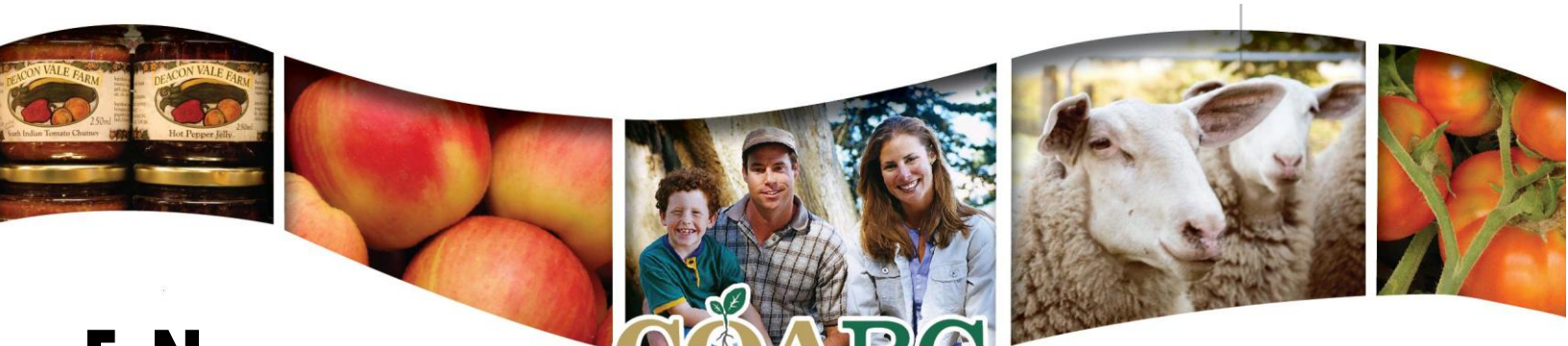
### New research explores cover-crop mulch alternatives for organics

*By Alison Grantham from the Rodale Institute*

Black plastic mulch does many things well for vegetable farmers, but its cost, disposal issues and environmental downsides continue to drive research into cover crop mulches that achieve the good without so much bad.

Black plastic suppresses weeds and diseases, and promotes earlier harvests thanks to soil warming, explaining the plastic field strips that are being used on an increasing percentage of the 140,000 acres of vegetable crops in the Mid-Atlantic region. A list of black plastic's negatives, however, has an increasing number of entries, including:

- **Cost**—about \$250-300 per acre to purchase and lay black plastic
- **Waste generation**—There's estimated to be 100-120 lb/acre of un-recyclable, petroleum-based waste that farmers must pay to landfill at season's end. (Soil and crop residue on the recovered plastic have made recycling impractical to date.)



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- **Soil erosion.** Plastic makes 50-70 percent of the field surface area impervious to water penetration, boosting runoff water volume by more than 40 percent, and soil erosion by more than 80 percent as rainfall and runoff concentrates in the remaining non-covered areas.
- **Loss of biota** in soil and within watersheds. This happens through: 1) toxic runoff, say from application of copper products where up to 36 percent of applied pesticides run off into nearby surface waters—at copper concentrations which are lethal for aquatic life; and 2) through the heating of soils caused by the black plastic, which also damages soil organic matter levels by speeding up breakdown of organic materials.
- **Insufficient weed suppression**, even with additional herbicides, due to weeds coming through the plant hole in the plastic, and the inability to cultivate other weeds which emerge—particularly in the South.

## Cover crop mulch alternatives

Cover crops have long helped organic farmers mitigate environmental damage and increase productivity, from oppressing weeds without herbicides to improving soil structure to diminish water runoff. They require more management and uncertainty than laying down plastic, but contribute to long-term biological improvement rather than landfill trash. Compared with plasticulture, cover crops can more effectively:

**Enrich soil.** For intensively farmed vegetable soils, a significant cover crop benefit is the potential to increase soil organic matter (SOM) levels, with or without additions of manure. Studies show increases of up to 600 kg C/hectare (cotton-tomato rotations in California) in trials where SOM levels remain constant or decrease in systems that do not use cover crops.

**Suppress weeds.** Pioneers in managing cover crops to replace non-organic inputs include John Teasdale and Aref Abdul-Baki, USDA-ARS researchers, Beltsville, Maryland. They worked extensively to develop a no-till system for tomatoes and other vegetables based on flail-mowed cover crops. They found cover crops (hairy vetch, or combinations of covers) were able to replace black plastic in their system and largely supplant synthetic nitrogen fertilizer. Herbicides were still often required, however, to achieve adequate weed control. Their work, findings, and recommendations are nicely summarized in a 32-pp. [Farmers' Bulletin](#). Other researchers have investigated no-till tomato production systems that [terminate cover crops by undercutting](#).

**Suppress disease.** Kumar et al. (2005) found cover crops left as a surface mulch “increased disease tolerance..high vigor, higher marketable yield, and delayed senescence.”

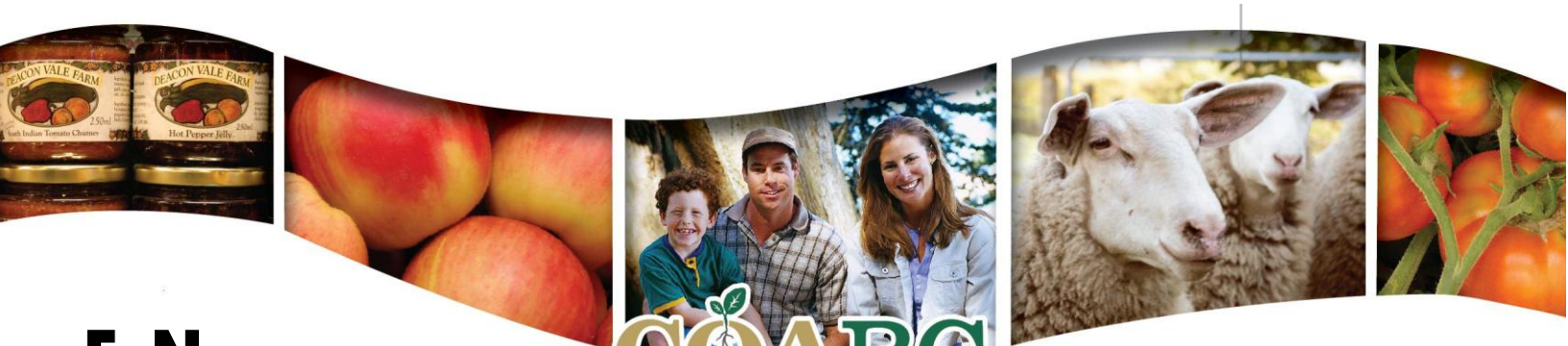
**Enhance soil biodiversity.** Cover crops significantly increase soil microbial life (fungi and protozoans) and altered microbial community structure.

As researchers and farmers experimented with cover-crop related techniques to displace black plastic during the past decade, Rodale Institute has developed and refined its organic no-till system for corn and soybean production This system was successfully translated into a tomato production system in a preliminary trial in [2009](#).

## Not black plastic

The Rodale Institute work in promoting cover crop use to replace black plastic in vegetable crops is funded by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program's [Northeast office](#) and the Marisla Foundation. Data will be collected to find out whether cover crop mulch systems:

- Suppress weeds as well as the standard black plastic method of production;
- Increase soil quality by
  - a. increasing organic matter inputs,
  - b. decreasing soil temperature,
  - c. increasing soil moisture,
  - d. decreasing % impervious surface area and % bare soil relative to the standard black plastic method of production; and
- Decrease farmer costs and increase farmer profits relative to the standard black plastic method of production.



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We'll be sharing our findings through a variety of channels including a production manual, field days on our farm and at collaborating farms, presentations at regional grower conferences, and regular articles on this site. To help us focus our efforts in ways that are most helpful to you, please take a moment to fill out our survey and share your comments below.

*Alison Grantham is research coordinator at the Rodale Institute.*

## Canadian Farmland Values:

Farm Credit Canada has released its Farmland Value Report, highlighting average changes in land values for each province and nationally. The report, which looks at land values for the last six months of 2009, found that across the nation, farmland increased 3.6 per cent between July and December. This follows increases of 2.9 and 5.6 per cent in the previous two reporting periods. Farmland values remained the same or increased in each province. Manitoba experienced the highest average increase at 5.9 per cent. Three provinces experienced similar average increases: Alberta with a 3.8 per cent increase, Saskatchewan with a 3.4 per cent increase and Ontario with a 3.3 per cent increase. New Brunswick followed with an increase of 2.5 per cent in farmland values, Nova Scotia with a 1.4 per cent increase and Quebec seeing a 1.3 per cent increase. Farmland values remained steady in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador.

British Columbia farmland values remained stable over the last six months of 2009. The unchanged value of farmland in the last half of 2009 was due to limited market activity throughout the province, partially due to the economic crisis on the forestry and oil industries, usually major sources of income for investment in B.C. agriculture. Agri-tourism has also dropped. The result slowed market activity since vendors are accustomed to several years of rising prices and aren't willing to lower prices, and buyers are cautious.

The full report is available at [http://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/AboutUs/Media/news20100412\\_e.asp](http://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/AboutUs/Media/news20100412_e.asp).

## EVENTS

### Organic Okanagan Festival

September 26, 2010. Kelowna

[http://www.okanagangreens.ca/festivals\\_detail.php?festivals\\_id=5](http://www.okanagangreens.ca/festivals_detail.php?festivals_id=5)

### 2011 Pacific Ag Show

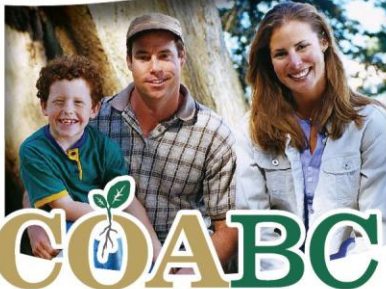
The dates for the Pacific Agriculture Show will be January 27-29, 2011.

### Building Sustainable Communities Conference

Kelowna, November 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

<http://www.freshoutlookfoundation.org/conferences/bsc10/bsc10.asp>

Speakers include Canadian Green Party leader **Elizabeth May** will sit on the panel following presentations by Dr. Bill Rees (UBC), Mark Holland (HB Lanarc), and Tom Osdoba (University of Oregon). The panel also includes **Geoff Meggs** (author, journalist, and Vancouver councillor) and **Pamela Goldsmith-Jones** (West Vancouver mayor), and will be moderated by **David Beers** (journalist and founding editor of The Tyee). Another great addition is former BC Liberal leader **Gordon Wilson**, who will present his ideas for an Agricultural Land Trust and companion Farmstead Act. And landscape architect/planner **John Buchko** will introduce the topic of Biophilia in Urban Environments.



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**DON'T FORGET**

## Newsletters for supporting organizations

BC Agriculture Council under the Community Agriculture seat. [http://www.bcac.bc.ca/index.php?page\\_id=2](http://www.bcac.bc.ca/index.php?page_id=2)

BCSPCA Find out what is happening at the BCSPCA at [http://support.spca.bc.ca/site/MessageViewer?em\\_id=2001.0&dlv\\_id=5801](http://support.spca.bc.ca/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2001.0&dlv_id=5801)

## Got an Organic Question?

Try Cyber-help <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/index.html>

**If you change your address or contact information send it to your CB office as soon as possible so that you don't miss out on receiving a BCOG and other materials.**