


What is



organic farming ?

*Produced by the
Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia*





High quality

Sufficient quantity

Safe working conditions

Living, healthy soil

Biological diversity

Ecological harmony

*Sustainable & renewable
resources*

Healthy animals

Natural livestock socialization

Integrated, diverse farms

Adequate farmer returns

...guaranteed.

What is Organic Farming?

Organic farming is an agricultural production system that promotes and enhances biological diversity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony.

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It's About the Soil

The concept that soil is a living system is fundamental to understanding the principles of organic farming. Organic farmers believe there is an essential link between the health of the soil, the health of plants, the health of animals and ultimately, the health of human populations. Thus the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of soil life is the cornerstone of the organic method. All concerns about organic practices can be answered by posing the question, "Is it good for the soil?"



There Are More Do's Than Don'ts

Though often characterized by what can't be used, such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, organic farming is actually more dependent on active improvements in the farm structure, such as crop rotations and green manure crops. Simply removing agrochemical inputs is not enough to turn a conventional farm into an organic farm. Dynamic organic practices which improve the biological activity of the soil and the environment must be undertaken.



Most organic farmers pay careful attention to composting. Quality compost is teeming with soil life. It is the essential soil organisms which are important to

organic farms, rather than just the commonly used crop nutrients. Organic farmers believe that soil which has been inoculated with quality compost is itself healthier soil for growing crops. Plants grown in healthy soil will be better able to feed and protect themselves, thus not requiring heavy applications of fertilizers and pesticides. Green manure crops – growing a crop (clover, buckwheat or rye, for example) in order to plough it into the soil before it seeds – provide organic matter and nutrients to following crops. Every organic farm must have a 'Crop Rotation Plan' to ensure that steps are being taken to improve the overall quality of the soil. The expression, "Feed the soil, not the plant," is a familiar refrain among organic farmers.

Animal Welfare Is Important

Similarly, the key to organic livestock management is the health and living environment of the animals.



Rather than relying on antibiotics to reduce disease, organic farms prevent disease by ensuring that animals have a healthy lifestyle, with lots of pasture, comfortable and spacious shelter, and opportunity for natural socialization. Many new organic dairy farmers have found their herds have fewer health problems when grazing organic pastures and eating organic feed than when confined and fed heavily concentrated feed. Simply replacing conventional concentrates with organic ones would not be adequate.

Chickens, ducks and turkeys must have access to pasture and (in the winter) covered outside runs. Battery cages are not allowed and poultry must be fed an all-vegetative diet, consisting only of certified organic grains, oilseeds, hay, grass and vegetable matter. Stocking rates inside barns and corrals require animals to be able stand-up, lie down, stretch and move comfortably and engage in normal social behaviour for an animal of their species. All livestock must have access to food, water, fresh air, daylight, veterinary care and shelter from inclement weather.



Organic Farms Care For the Environment

Environmental protection is the primary reason most organic farmers become involved in organic agriculture. Concern for the environment is portrayed in many aspects of organic farming:

- *care in the handling of all animal wastes*

- *protection and fostering of wildlife including wild bird populations*

- *avoiding the use of agricultural toxins - pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, chemical fertilizers*

- *protection of stream banks and watersheds*

- *researching new ways to recycle agricultural nutrients - closed-loop systems*

- *promoting local production for local consumption to reduce the environmental effect of global transportation of food - reducing food air-miles*



Principles of Organic Farming

Here are the Principles of Organic Farming and Processing as determined by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM):



Produce food of high quality in sufficient quantity.



Interact in a constructive and life-enhancing way with natural systems and cycles.



Consider the wider social and ecological impact of the organic production and processing system.



Encourage and enhance biological cycles within the farming system, involving micro-organisms, soil flora and fauna, plants and animals.



Develop a valuable and sustainable aquatic ecosystem.



Maintain and increase long term fertility of soils.

*Minimise all forms of
pollution.*



*Produce fully biodegrad-
able organic products.*



*Process organic products using
renewable resources.*



*To create a harmonious balance
between crop production and
animal husbandry.*



*Use, as far as possible, renewable
resources in locally organised
production systems.*



*Give all livestock conditions of life with
due consideration for the basic aspects of
their innate behaviour.*



*Promote the healthy use and proper care
of water, water resources and
all life therein.*





Produce textiles which are long-lasting and of good quality.



Progress toward an entire production, processing and distribution chain which is both socially just and ecologically responsible.



Maintain the genetic diversity of the production system and its surroundings, including the protection of plant and wildlife habitats.



Allow everyone involved in organic production and processing a quality of life which meets their basic needs and allows an adequate return and satisfaction from their work, including a safe working environment.



Certification: the Contract Between Organic Farmers and Consumers

Organic certification is the only guarantee to consumers that organic farmers are doing what they say they are doing. Organic Certification can take many forms, but it is basically a system of site inspection by an independent third party, reviewing of inspection reports and assignment of organic status. It is the process of farming which is inspected and certified, rather than the final product. Thus, many product labels will indicate a food has been “Produced in Accordance”, with certain standards. In British Columbia, this process is undertaken by a variety of independent societies based in the different regions and is overseen by the Certified Organic Associations of B.C. (COABC)



Standards are Basis of Certification

The COABC publishes its Organic Management Standards in the “British Columbia Certified Organic Production Operation Policies and Management Standards” along with the list of materials which are allowed under the British Columbia Certified Organic program. The Organic Management Standards is a living document and is amended yearly as new information about products and practices becomes recognised. The Organic Management Standards are meant to be used as a guide to the minimum standard only and should be accompanied by organic production guides for relevant crops or livestock.

Government Legislation & Control Extra Assurance for the Consumer

Organic certification in B.C. is governed by the Regulations of the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act of B.C. There is a program of Provincial Organic Standards, government controlled audit of the certification process, and a province-wide organic designation. The phrase, British Columbia Certified Organic and the accompanying program symbol can be used only by farmers or processors who are certified under the B.C. Certified Organic program - there are large penalties under law for their misuse.

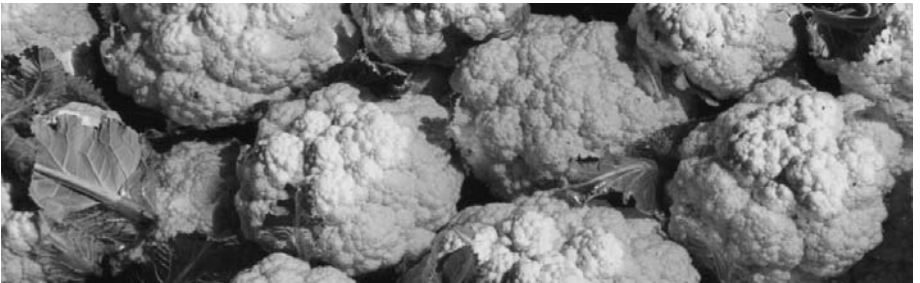


Processors, Handlers and Retailers Organic Certification Applies

As organic Certification seeks to provide a discernible audit trail for all organic food, from the farm to the retailer, companies which manufacture or distribute food beyond the farm gate must also be involved in the organic certification process. Organic Certification Standards specify which processes, cleaning materials and ingredients may be used in organic processing. These Standards are constantly changing as more organic foods become available and more environmentally friendly processing products are discovered.

Steps to Organic Certification in B.C.

- 1 Farmer applies for certification to Certification Body.
- 2 Farmer must complete Certification Application and provide documentation as requested.
- 3 Farm maps, production records, herd health records and material application records are examples of documents which may be required.
- 4 The farm must be inspected by a Verification Officer who is a member in good standing of the International Organic Inspectors Association.
- 5 The farm's organic status (1st, 2nd, 3rd year transition or Certified Organic) is determined by the Certification Body and the farmer receives a Certificate which allows them to use the phrase B.C. Certified Organic to market their products.
- 6 This process must be completed annually to retain organic status.





Isn't everything really organic?

The term "organic" refers to a specific farming system as described in the COABC Farm Management Standards. Ecologique, or Biologique is used in other parts of the world to describe the same process. The words "organic" "spray-free" or "natural", without certification, have no generally recognised meaning.

Doesn't the spray from neighbouring farms pollute organic farmers' crops?

Organic farms must plant buffer strips alongside neighbouring fence lines. Organic crops cannot be harvested from these buffer strips.



Why does organic food cost so much?

Organic farms are often smaller and require more labour to replace agro-chemicals. Chemical-intensive agriculture can produce more product faster while animals allowed to live more naturally may not grow as fast or produce as many eggs as those who are confined and fed drugs. As organic production increases and new organic farming methods are discovered, price premiums for organic food will decrease.

If I convert my farm to organic, will I have to replace all my fence posts?

The use of fence posts is determined by what they are made of, as detailed in the COABC Materials List. As disposing of prohibited posts would cause more environmental harm than leaving them in place, organic farmers do not have to replace existing fence posts but must use only approved posts on new fencing.

Is organic food sanitary?

In addition to the regulations for organic certification, organic farmers must abide by the Government Food Safety Standards just like other farmers. Organic farms are also inspected annually by independent inspectors. Organic farmers are the most heavily regulated farmers in Canada.

What about Genetically Modified Organisms?



The use of genetically modified organisms is prohibited by all Standards for organic certification around the world. The U.S. National Organic Standards Board defines a GMO as “made with techniques that alter the molecular or cell biology of an organism by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes. Genetic engineering includes recombinant DNA, cell fusion, micro and macro-encapsulation, gene deletion and doubling, introducing a foreign gene, and changing position of genes. It shall not include breeding, conjugation, fermentation, hybridization, in-vitro fertilization or tissue culture.” The COABC has taken the position that the possible threats from genetic engineering have not been properly researched and has proposed that British Columbia be declared a ‘GMO Free Zone’.

Do I have to use certified organic feed for my livestock?

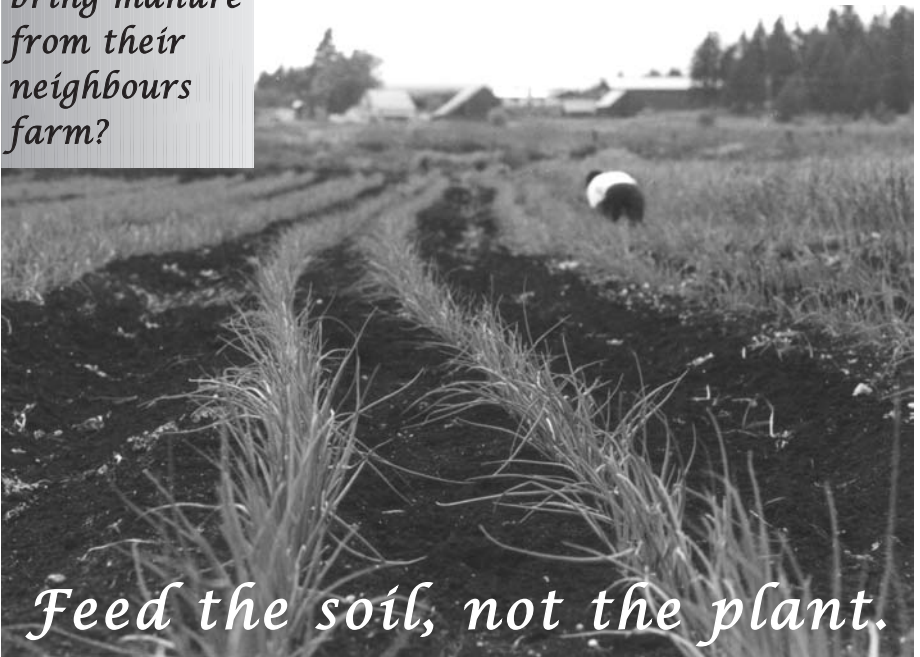
Yes. Certified organic feed is becoming readily available throughout the province. The COABC website can furnish information about feed suppliers. Farmers are allowed to use conventional minerals in their feed mixes, provided they do not contain prohibited substances.

Will I not be allowed to treat my animals with antibiotics?

COABC standards require treatment of sick animals. However, slaughter animals treated with prohibited products (such as antibiotics) may never be sold as certified organic.

Are organic farmers allowed to bring manure from their neighbours farm?

Manure brought from off-site must be fully composted before it can be used. All inputs brought from off-farm must be documented in farm records.





Organic Farming Supports Rural Economies

The intensive nature of organic farming provides for increased employment in rural communities. Organic farmers play a vital role in bringing producers and consumers together through farmers' markets and organic farmers have been the leaders in the proliferation of community supported agriculture systems and box delivery businesses.

Local agricultural production and local consumption helps smaller population centres thrive and helps protect the environment by reducing food transportation.


Farming cannot take place except in Nature; therefore if Nature does not thrive, farming cannot thrive.

But we know that. Nature includes us. It is not a place into which we reach from some safe standpoint outside it.

We are in it and are a part of it while we use it. If it does not thrive, we cannot thrive.

The appropriate measure of farming then is the world's health and our health, and this is inescapably one measure.

-Wendell Berry



Our website contains information
about organic farming, farmers
and organic products from BC, as
well as links to other Certification
Bodies worldwide.

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