



Status of Organic Extension in BC, 2011

Please feel free to share this information with MLA's, MP's and colleagues as it impacts every area of the province.

Organic Extension in BC

BC has been a leader in Organics on a national level for many years. In 2007, the Provincial Government financially supported the COABC in creating Extension Services for the Organic sector. While the program was administered by COABC, it extended well beyond COABC's membership.

In the three years of the program, the organic extension agent was engaged in meeting the needs of producers, working with an assortment of regulatory agencies, serving as a research liaison, as well as handling supplier and government enquiries. This encouraged economic growth within the organic sector and knowledge of organics beyond the sector. The industry has benefited and grown as a result of the Organic Extension position.

Our neighbours to the south also realize the value of extension. For example, in Washington State, organic producers have access to 7 experienced state extension agents, in addition to certification fee subsidies (up to \$750 US/yr) and access to over 40 state scientists doing pertinent research.

BC has taken a step backwards with the elimination of the extension position and now has the dubious distinction of being one of only two provinces without sufficient organic extension services.

Importance of Organics in BC:

BC's Organic production is important because it:

- mitigates climate change better than any other system of agriculture
- reduces the carbon footprint (prairie research has shown by not using synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, organic farming systems are 50% more energy efficient than their mainstream counterparts)
- helps build the rural and urban agriculture community
- creates farming opportunities and jobs
- stimulates local economies
- reduces everyone's exposure to pesticides
- helps deliver local nutrient fresh food which improves the overall health of BC citizens, diminishing our need for health services
- fills consumer demand for organic products with British Columbia produced products rather than imported products

"Organic agriculture has a number of environmental benefits. Not only does it build nutrient-rich soil and help to keep our water supply clean; it also removes carbon dioxide from the air and sequesters it. In fact, according to research at The Rodale Institute, organic practices can remove about 7,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air per year and sequester it in an acre of farmland. Accordingly, Rodale estimates that if all 434 million acres of U.S. cropland were converted to organic practices, it

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would be the equivalent of eliminating 217 million cars—nearly 88 percent of all cars in the country today and more than a third of all the automobiles in the world!”

Increasing Organic production increases all the above mentioned benefits.

Organic Extension in BC:

Organic Extension **increases organic production in BC by:**

- helping current organic producers and processors overcome barriers and build capacity to:
 - increase # of enterprises
 - increase production quantities
 - increase land under organic cultivation
 - enhance Operator knowledge
 - maintain compliance with standards
- supporting non-organic operators to move to organic production
- helping ALL producers and processors employ organic solutions to their problems thus broadening the reach of organic methods and expanding benefits.

British Columbia’s Organic Extension Services has also assisted British Columbia's adaptation to the new federal Organic Products Regulation that oversees interprovincial and international trade as well as the use of the Canada Organic logo and has helped to minimize the potential negative impacts of such adjustments within the province. However, because in BC there is no provincial legislation requiring certification to use the word organic on food and livestock feeds, the federal regulations have created an uneven playing field within the province. In the past, the Organic Extension agent would have helped the sector successfully navigate these challenges, as it is the sector is now left struggling through it alone.

Every riding in the province benefits from increased organic production. With the grassroots push for more local food, there is a great potential for economic growth in the Organic sector. An organic extension agent would be able to support that growth and bring an increase of organic benefits, mentioned above, to all of BC.

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