
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Agriculture

Plans underway to grow B.C. organic sector

VICTORIA – The Ministry of Agriculture is consulting with the organic sector about developing a three pillar approach to strengthen the awareness and reputation of B.C.’s organic foods, locally, across Canada, and around the world.

The consultations involve regulating the use of the term “organic”, developing transitional strategies that support farmers to become certified, creating business strategy and market development programs, and creating a brand to market B.C. organic foods.

The proposed change will require all products marketed as “organic” in B.C. to be certified under either a provincial or national certification program. Operators producing and selling their organic products strictly within B.C. will require provincial certification. B.C. companies with customers in other provinces or countries will require certification by a federally accredited certification body, just as they do today.

The provincial certification program follows the same standard as the national program, but with streamlined record keeping and documentation practices. Provincial certification offers growers access to the local organic market with less paperwork, while still ensuring B.C. consumers have certainty when purchasing organic foods.

Under the model being discussed:

- Following the development of an effective and efficient administration and enforcement system and a suitable period of transition, producers and processors that are not certified under either the provincial or federal certification program would not be able to use the term “organic” to describe or market their products.
- Producers, processors and handlers of organic products including farm gate sales, farmers’ markets and retail stores, would be required to have documentation verifying their accredited certification.
- Reports by citizens concerned that an uncertified product produced and sold exclusively within B.C. was being marketed as organic would be investigated by the B.C. government.

In addition to conversations with Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) and individual farmers, the ministry will be distributing an e-survey seeking input from organic farmers about the proposed model. The responses will be compiled and used to determine how the model being developed should proceed.

Requiring organic certification would assure consumers the products they purchase are grown using recognized organic practices, and promote the highest standards of organic production in B.C. Currently, companies with organic products produced, handled, and sold exclusively within B.C., may choose to participate in the BC Certified Organic Program, which is administered by

the Certified Organic Association of BC.

Quotes:

B.C. Agriculture Minister Norm Letnick –

“By working with B.C. organic sector stakeholders, we’ll develop a model that creates consumer and industry certainty around organic products, and ensures transitional strategies are in place to help small businesses seeking the benefits of joining a brand of recognized organic standards. There are huge opportunities for local organic food producers in B.C. and around the world and this is a key step the B.C. government and stakeholders are taking to best take advantage of them.”

Susan Snow, COABC co-president

“COABC is pleased to work with the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen the B.C. organic sector through the proposed initiative. Clarity in the marketplace will improve by requiring that everyone using the term organic is certified through an accredited certification body. It will ensure that consumers have better information when making their purchasing decisions and it will also encourage continued growth of organics in B.C.”

Quick Facts:

- COABC members include 564 operations producing certified organic goods and 96 farms in transition to producing certified organic goods.
- The B.C. organic sector is varied and includes livestock, dairy, vegetables, fruit and berries, and spice and herb producers, grains and seeds and many specialty value added products.
- Building the local market for B.C. foods, including the organic industry, is a key commitment of government's Agrifoods Strategy to lead the agrifoods sector growth into a \$14-billion-a-year industry by 2017.

Learn More

The existing voluntary B.C. Certified Organic Program: www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

National Organic Standards:

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/organicproducts/eng/1300139461200/1300140373901>

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