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Training Organic Inspectors

Just what does the designation "certified organic" mean?

Well, it signifies the grower has met a series of stringent production criteria established by a certifying body—in this part of the country that means either the Maritime Certified Organic Growers of the Organic Crop Improvement Association. Since the industry grows, so does the need for workers to conduct the certification inspections.

That's why the P.E.I. ADAPT Council (together with its sister organizations in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) to provide financial assistance to the Falls Brook Centre to conduct two certification courses earlier this year. The council administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The courses in basic farm inspector and basic process inspectors each ran four days and were offered by certified personnel from the International Organic Inspectors Association—a training body that is recognized world-wide.

"Basically, the graduates can then hire themselves out on a contract basis to the certification bodies," said Andrea Berry, organic agriculture co-ordinator for the centre.

She explained the courses offered an intensive in-depth exploration of certified organic farming and processing, identifying key control points in organic systems. The courses included classroom instruction by Canadian Organic Growers President, Janine Gibson, field trips to local organic farms and processors and mock inspections with reports, and examinations.

Organic agriculture is one of four main pillars at the Centre, which is located near the New Brunswick-Maine border in the community of Knowlesville. The main purpose of the centre, created in 1992, is to develop and test ways of living more environmentally friendly and

economically sustainable.

The 420 acre site features organic gardens, orchards, forest trails and promotion of ecological certification. Other on-site activities include solar and wind energy systems, a small conference centre, herbariums, tree nurseries, non-timber forest product plantings for mushrooms and ginseng, and other restoration sites that provide the basis for many outreach programs.

The Organic Agriculture program has deep roots at Falls Brook Centre, as the first garden was built in 1990. Since then, they have expanded to include 1 hectare (2.5 acres) of certified organic vegetables, fruit orchards, mushrooms, herbs, flowers, greenhouses, seeds, and heritage gardens. When working abroad, we encourage rural communities to attain food self-sufficiency, and bring many ideas back to the centre to try out here.

"We are very much a 'hands-on organization,'" Andrea said. "We want to prove that the ideas tested here can work can be used on farms throughout Atlantic Canada.

Cranberries Are a Relatively New Crop in the Land of the Potato.

Since the berries are grown in a bog, drying and sorting are key ingredients to a quality crop and a good price. Most growers perform those tasks by hand, which is both time consuming and labour intensive.

With funding help from the P.E.I. ADAPT Council, which administers the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), Leigh Biggar is confident he has found a better way.

An electrician by trade, Biggar planted the first cranberries on his Inverness property in 1999. Earlier this year, he went to Massachusetts and purchased a used sorting/drying machine. He explained "even though this machine is several years old, it works essentially the same way as the newer models on the market.

"By the time we brought it back home, we were right into harvesting season," he said. "We did some fine tuning and we got it to work pretty well to meet our needs."

He is looking forward to working with the machine over the winter to fine tune it even more. Biggar added "like anything else, it takes a little while to get all the bugs out— I am confident we will be full perfected for this year's crop.

The machine passes the berries along a conveyor belt, where they are dried and separated to take out any foreign particles. There is a manual operator at the end of the belt to ensure the machine has not missed anything.

Biggar held a demonstration of the machine in October which attracted 10-12 producers. That number even included some growers from Ontario who were in the province on vacation. As well, an engineer was interested in producing a made in P.E.I. version of the equipment.

While the market for cranberries has been a little more sluggish than usual, Biggar said there are signs things are on the rebound. He said the industry has been working hard over the past few years developing new markets and he is confident those efforts are now paying off.

There are about 10-12 commercial cranberry producers in the province. Bogs must be professionally engineered and constructed and it is 3-4 years before the first crop is ready for commercial harvesting. A properly designed and maintained bog can produce in excess of 15,000 pounds of cranberries per acre.

Agroforestry on the Farm - Exploring Potential Opportunities

At the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Associations Conference (December 6-7, 2005) Alan Rennie, President of the SCIA welcomed the crowd of 100+ participants. His greeting, which also informed the group that the SCIA currently has four agroforestry demonstration sites with over 20 species on display in regions across the Island, set the tone for two informative and thought provoking days of presentations.

Dr. Andrew Gordon, University of Guelph presented a report that included over 20 years of research at the Guelph campus where he explored the integration of trees and crops, i.e inter-cropping with trees. He pointed out that Southern Ontario, alone imports 45 million bd ft (approx \$30,000,000) of red oak lumber per year from the USA. In addition to potential lumber markets he emphasized that there is opportunity for pharmaceuticals, maple syrup, woods grown ginseng and shiitake mushrooms.

Dr. Gordon also described “silvopasture” combining pasture and tree crops, as a technique that is often a hard sell to farmers but a system that offers many benefits to animals and producers.

These types of systems have been more broadly adopted in developing countries. However, they are becoming popular in France, Spain, New Zealand and Australia

More common agroforestry systems, Dr. Gordon pointed out, included riparian zone management and biomass production for biofuels

He concluded his presentation by demonstrating that the economics of agroforestry for annual commodity production shows that it is a good idea but that more importantly, growing trees is a way of building long-term equity

Ernine Grimo, Grimo Nut Nursery in Ontario presented various opportunities for nut production and marketing. He emphasized that nut trees are a long term, low cost crop. There are new disease resistant varieties of American and Chinese Chestnuts which he thinks have significant opportunities for Maritime producers. Pine Nuts and Hazelnuts also appeared to be two species which he thought had significant hopes for Prince Edward Island. He pointed out that Ferrara’s needs 10,000 acres of hazelnuts to supply their market for ‘Nutella.’

Bill Glen, PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry, described the importance of selecting species that are not only right for PEI soils but also trees that will most likely adapt to climate change.

According to Bill Schroeder, AAFC, planting trees on the farm can add green to more than just the landscape. Solid returns on products like wood, nuts and fruit are making the economic case for agroforestry and, as more farmers look into this emerging practice, researchers are turning their attention toward its environmental benefits. Studies in Canada and around the world have looked at the financial management side of agroforestry, but little work has been done to measure its positive impact on land, air and water. This is critical information for producers as they compile environmental farm plans and in an effort to fill the void, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will conduct a variety of studies over the next four years through its Greencover Canada program. Projects will focus on the benefits of agroforestry in areas like biodiversity, air quality, soil and water health, greenhouse gases and odour reduction.

Other speakers included Kevin Sanderson, Steve Javorek, Ken Webb, and Christine Noronha all from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; along with PEI’s Gary Schneider, MacPhail Woods/Nursery and Sandy Purdy, Prairie Berry Inc. (Saskatchewan). Overall, their message was

that agroforestry is another tool for diversification into non commodity based production and that it has significant opportunity for developing unique, value added crops which could draw new customers to the farm. They suggested that some of the key opportunities for PEI may come from new research taking place at the Nutrisciences Centre at UPEI; including rose hips. Other species mentioned included: Serviceberry (a close relative to Saskatoon berry), Elderberry, Willow (for biomass production), and high value native hardwoods such as Yellow Birch, Ash and Red Oak and Rock Maple.

For more information, participants were contact:

PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association, PO Box 21012 Charlottetown, PE C1A 9H6
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada <http://www.agr.gc.ca> (And search “agroforestry”)
Association for Temperate Agroforestry <http://www.aftaweb.org/>

Prince Edward Island Economy Progress Report 2005

The Prince Edward Island economy in 2005 has been showing signs of strength and the national performance remains strong. Economic growth is supported by strong employment gains, increased manufacturing activity, export growth and robust non-residential construction. However, energy prices and continued appreciation of the Canadian dollar are key factors to continued economic growth.

In Agriculture, increased support payments and improved farm commodity prices resulted in higher farm cash receipts in the first half of 2005; up 7.2% relative to the same period one year ago. Potato receipts for the first two quarters of 2005 were valued at \$80.7 million, an increase of 4.3% compared to the same period in 2004. Potato prices in October 2005 were in the order of \$1.80 per 10 pound bag in the Toronto market. This compares to an average of \$1.00 per pound received in 2004

For the full report see: http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/pt_economy05.pdf

Issues and Opportunities

Saskatchewan: Green Strategy

Saskatchewan is concluding its consultations on the outcomes and actions of a proposed Green Strategy with comments on the framework and the green forums due on November 30. Supporting documents include a 2005 State of the Environment Report, a Summary of Informal Discussion, a Biodiversity Action Plan and the Green Strategy Framework.

If the province follows through on its objective to ensure a future which is both prosperous and green, it may change the very nature of Canadian society in much the same way that Tommy Douglas did when, as Saskatchewan premier elected in 1944 under the slogan Humanity First, he combined economic development with social standards and services such as medicare. Current Premier Lorne Calvert said, "We are a people with a unique knack of turning dreams as big as a prairie sky into realities as solid as the prairie soil."

As General Motors, a company one analyst describes as a corporate dinosaur,

announces closing of plants and loss of almost 4,000 jobs out of the total 20,000 personnel in Canada, development of a green strategy not only in Saskatchewan but in the rest of Canada may be critical to all of our futures.

Saskatchewan Environment. Green Strategy. Consultation.
<http://www.se.gov.sk.ca/Green/Consultation.htm>

Research Boost for Wild Rose hips

Wild rose cuttings are becoming better known for their medicinal value yet information such as the best growing conditions for producing rosehips fruit as well as which strain of wild roses produces the most chemically valuable rosehips is needed. This research work will move forward more quickly with the recent opening of a state-of-the-art greenhouse at UPEI. The new greenhouse is a key component for the Atlantic Canada Network on Bioactive Compounds (ACNBC), P.E.I. The ACNBC investigates the health benefits of wild rosehips and wild blueberries. Rosehips, like blueberries are known to contain vitamins as well as compounds called antioxidants. Antioxidants are linked to the prevention and treatment of certain diseases such as cancer and heart disease. The wild rose cuttings are grown in the new greenhouse they are then planted at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Experimental Farm in Harrington, P.E.I. as well as in fields in P.E.I., Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Growing Anti-GM Food Movement in Eastern Europe

Monday, November 14, 2005

Most Polish and Russian consumers do not want to eat food made from genetically modified ingredients, says new poll, as the anti-GM movement gathers pace in Eastern Europe. Around 76 per cent of Polish consumers said they didn't want to eat any food containing GM ingredients, according to a PBS opinion poll. The news follows an earlier study by Russia's largest public opinion research body, VCIOM, that 95 per cent of Russians aware of GM ingredients said they were either opposed to them or seriously concerned by them. The surveys are an important sign that public opinion in Eastern Europe is moving towards the widespread GM scepticism already present GM scepticism. Research published by the European Commission earlier this year says that only 14 per cent of the European population believes GM food is safe. More than 450 food companies across Russia had now adopted a GM-free policy, including international giants such as Nestlé and Coca-Cola. Consumer rejection of GM food has become more of a problem since January this year, when Russia introduced new labelling laws forcing producers to state any GM ingredients used on product labels.

Organics Predicted to Be One of Top 10 Food Trends for 2006

Organics, everywhere: Once upon a time, if you wanted organic foods or beverages, you had to shop in stores that specialized in health and natural food

products. No longer. Organics are going mainstream and fast. In 2005, brands like Ragu, Orville Redenbacher and Ocean Spray all added organic variants. Expect to see even more mass-market brands take the plunge in 2006. Organic introductions of new food and beverage products in the USA have nearly doubled since 1998 from 944 products launched that year to 2,369 that have debuted through the first ten months of 2005, says Datamonitor's Productscan Online database of new products. Moreover, the percentage of "loyal users" of natural and organic foods and beverages in the USA and Europe is expected to nearly double by the year 2009, topping 170 million consumers. Other predominant trends include: prepared meals and dietary foods.

See full article at www.food-business-review.com

Canadian Organic Growers Releases 2004 Organic Production Statistics

The number of certified organic farmers continued to climb in 2004 to 3670, an increase of close to 11% from 2003, representing about 1.5% of all Canadian farms. A further 257 farmers were in transition to organic agriculture. Saskatchewan and Quebec led the pack both in terms of the number of organic producers and the rate of growth. The value of all organic crops was estimated at between \$250 and \$350 million. The big story in 2004 was the dramatic increase in the number of certified organic processors and handlers - from 499 in 2003 to 742 in 2004, representing a 48% increase.

This work was supported by a grant from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the statistics were compiled by Anne Macey. We are in the process of compiling production statistics for 2005. For the full report, visit the COG web site at www.cog.ca