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Welcome to “ON Organic”

Hugh Martin, Organic Crop Production Program Lead, OMAFRA

Welcome to the second issue of “ON Organic”, OMAFRA’s newest newsletter. Once again I want to thank EFAO, COG and OCO for helping us to circulate the newsletter through their email groups. I also want to thank other organizations who have received the newsletter and have forwarded on to other members and colleagues in their group or some have posted it on their website.

To subscribe to this newsletter, go to the webpage

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/subscribe/index.html#organic>

The newsletter is also now posted on the OMAFRA website at:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

You may also have noted that the OMAFRA website has a new look. Same great information with a new look and hopefully more user friendly with links in the side-bar.

The OMAFRA Organic pages are linked from:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html>

The ON Organic Team

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Agriculture is Changing – 2001 to 2006

Dorene Collins, Marketing and Customer Service Program Lead, OMAFRA,

The 2006 Agriculture Census reveals how agriculture is changing across the country and in our province. The first chart shows how farm types have changed and what areas of production are increasing or decreasing. In Ontario it is interesting to see that non-traditional crops and livestock farms are increasing and it would be interesting to explore what ‘other’ crop and animal production includes. I am sure these numbers support the notion that the marketplace is changing for agricultural products and a large determinant is the consumer.

Farm Type

Source: 2006 Agricultural Census — Statistics Canada

Ontario – Farm Type	2006	2001	Percent Change	
			Ontario	Canada
Total farms	57,211	59,728	-4.2%	-7.1%
Cattle ranching and farming	15,989	19,778	-19.2%	-12.3%
Hog and pig farming	2,222	2,507	-11.4%	-18.2%
Oilseed and grain farming	13,056	13,776	-5.2%	-11.5%
Fruit and tree-nut farming	1,892	1,974	-4.2%	7.6%
Poultry and egg production	1,700	1,749	-2.8%	-7.3%
Greenhouse and horticulture	2,822	2,876	-1.9%	-1.5%
Sheep and goat farming	1,365	1,262	8.2%	-7.9%
Vegetable and melon farming	1,769	1,614	9.6%	4.1%
Other crop farming	8,823	7,935	11.2%	-5.6%
Other animal production	7,573	6,257	21.0%	18.0%

Organic Production

Source: 2006 Agricultural Census – Statistics Canada

Ontario - Farms Producing Certified Organic Products			
	2006	2001	% Change
Total Number of Organic Farms	593	405	46.4%
Hay or field crops	467	308	51.6%
Fruits, vegetables or greenhouse products	174	120	45.0%
Animals or animal products	172	120	43.3%
Maple products	8	6	33.3%
Other products	34	32	6.3%

This second chart exhibits the increase in organic production in Ontario since 2001. The number of certified organic farms in Ontario grew 46% compared to 59% nationally during this period. According to the ACNielsen survey in 2007 retail sales of organic showed annual growth of 24% in grocery stores in Ontario (from 2005 to 2006). Canadian imports of Organic food products is estimated at 70%, providing a great opportunity for increased production in Ontario.

From a marketing and consumer perspective organic products continue to meet market demand for a growing sector of the population due to the fact that these products instil a sense of trust and support personal values such as health, environment, and support for the farmer.

Growth Brings Opportunities

By Dorene Collins, Marketing and Customer Service Program Lead, OMAFRA

The opportunity for growth in Ontario of the organic sector is positive. Attributes of organic products support customer loyalty which is the cornerstone to business success. Whether you sell your organic product(s) direct to the consumer or supply the broader value chain, customer loyalty is vital and includes some basic principles as identified by John Stanley, well known direct and retail marketing guru of John Stanley Associates – Centre of Advanced Retail Concepts <http://www.johnstanley.cc/>:

- People want authentic – what is real. Authentic is the new sensitivity and farmers have an inherent advantage to offer authenticity.
- Your business (product/service, etc.) has to affect the following for your customers in order to build loyalty and make a profit: 1) Life; 2) Health; 3) Family; 4) Appearance; 5) Wealth; 6) Happiness.

To build an advocate for your business you must:

- a) reduce customer stress;
- b) delight customers;
- c) do it consistently

A basic principle in marketing is that 20% of your customers bring you 80% of your business – or 20% are loyal

customers. Keeping loyal customers should be focus of any marketing program you invest in.

John goes on to share his expertise relating to customer loyalty and advises businesses to move from attracting customers to engaging advocates:

Customers: they use your business as well as someone else's – they buy your product(s) but are not loyal to you.

Client: they don't tell anyone about your business because you never asked them to.

Advocates: objective is to create a 'my' situation for your business (example: 'my' barber, mechanic, farm market). These customers tell the world how wonderful you are.

John sums up by stating: "If you can improve loyalty by 5% you can increase lifetime profits by 95%, and it can take years to get advocates, yet you can lose them in seconds if you ruin their relationship with your business".

We live in a consumer based society, understanding demographic shifts, consumer preferences, and marketplace trends are important in operating a successful business whether your focus is production, processing or retail.

Census Canada Study: Organic from niche to mainstream

Consumers by now are used to seeing a range of organic fruits and vegetables for sale in their local grocery store, but the most common certified organic product reported by Canadian farmers is probably not what they think.

In fact, the most commonly reported certified organic class consists of field crops and hay, according to a new study published in the online version of *Canadian Agriculture at a Glance*. The study analyzed the evolution in the organic farming sector in Canada between 2001 and 2006. <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/080328/d080328a.htm>

Recent Articles from Other OMAFRA Newsletters

Payback from Good Soil Management

By Adam Hayes, *Soil Management Specialist, OMAFRA* — Do you know the benefits or payback from managing your soil well? It is often difficult to compare the benefits of your good soil management of a field to a neighbouring property with poorer soil management. There can be a lot of variables between the two fields and yield comparisons may not always be reliable.

Full article at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/field/news/croptalk/2008/ct-0308a1.htm>

Organic Field Crops in 2008

By Hugh Martin, *Organic Crop Production Program Lead, OMAFRA* — There has been a lot of excitement lately about the increased prices that are available to conventional field crops. What a difference a year or two can make! Over the last six months, organic crops have also been in short supply and those prices have also gone up.

Table 1 compares estimated gross margins for various organic and conventionally grown crops, based on expenses from the 2008 OMAFRA Crop Budgets and estimated crop prices as expected at harvest in 2008.

Full article at:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/field/news/croptalk/2008/ct-0308a10.htm>

Options for Emergency Wind Control

By Anne Verhallen, *Soil Management Specialist (Horticultural Crops), OMAFRA* — Spring has sprung and soils are drying rapidly. Historically we usually see the highest, sustained wind speeds in the first few weeks of May. Gusty winds during a storm or just high winds can move soil. If the soil is dry, loose and bare there is a good chance that some of it is on the move and with it your valuable soil fertility! Control erosion early to prevent crop damage and further soil blowing. Watch areas like sandy knolls, headlands, roadways and other traffic areas for the early signs of soil movement.

Full article at:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/news/hortmatt/2008/05hrt08a1.htm>

Building Your Soil's Production Capacity with Cover Crops

By Anne Verhallen, *Soil Management Specialist (Horticultural Crops), OMAFRA* — I hate to see bare soil, particularly during the growing season. It seems like a missed opportunity to build a better soil for the future. Pulling out trees and vines and renovating the field offers a real chance to build the productive capacity of your soil for the future. Cover crops can:

- Add active organic matter - both the above ground residue and the roots from a cover crop contribute to the organic matter levels of soil. The living root systems also exude exudates that contribute to soil structure, increase soil moisture capacity, improve drainage and provide food for a diverse soil life.
- Cover the soil to reduce erosion potential and suppress weed growth and seed set.
- Provide a break in pest cycles by introducing a different species or non-host plant. Choose the right cover crops and keep the area weed free to reduce nematode numbers.
- Nutrient scavenging - or cycling. Cover crops can capture remaining nutrients from the main crop and release in the next cropping year.

Full article at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/news/tenderfr/tf1204a3.htm>

Pasture Management Tips for the Coming Season

By Jack Kyle, *Provincial Grazier Specialist, OMAFRA* — A well managed pasture will provide the lowest cost feed source for beef cows. Forage that is grazed at the optimum time will provide your livestock with high quality feed throughout the growing season. With pasture there are no harvest costs, no storage costs and no feeding costs other than some fence and a water system, both of which will last for years. Another advantage of a pasture system is that there is no bedding requirement and no manure to spread.

Full article at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/beef/news/vbn0208a3.htm>

Control of Common Scab: A Challenging Task

By Eugenia Banks, *Potato Specialist, OMAFRA* — Common scab is one of the oldest known potato diseases of worldwide distribution. For about 100 years, it was not considered to be of economic importance in many potato production areas. However, the incidence and severity of this disease have increased over the last decade to the point where common scab is now an important potato disease worldwide. Common scab does not reduce yield, but affected tubers are unmarketable because of the superficial, raised or pitted corky lesions. Growers have usually reported common scab in fields after spreading lime or contaminated cattle manure, or in fields where infected seed was planted. Lately, growers are reporting common scab in fields that had grown clean crops or in fields that had never grown potatoes.

Full article at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/news/vegnews/2008/vg0408a1.htm>

New Publication Helps Organic Farmers Evaluate Flaming Weeds

By Dale Mutch, Michigan State University

Weed control in organic farming systems continues to be the most prominent pest problem for these farmers. Three years ago at the MSU W. K. Kellogg Biological Station purchased a flamer to evaluate and compare flaming weeds to rotary hoeing weeds in corn and soybean organic systems. Based on the research, they have published *Flaming as a Method of Weed Control in Organic Farming Systems* (MSU Extension bulletin E-3038) with the results of our two years of trials. This is available on the web at <http://www.emdc.msue.msu.edu/Bulletin/PDF/E3038.pdf>

This publication can be used throughout the North Central

Region by organic farmers growing corn. Even though several farmers in Michigan use fire to control weeds in soybeans, there is a fine line between successful weed control and killing the soybeans. For this reason, the researchers only recommend using flame weed control on corn. Corn's growing point is below the soil surface when flaming weeds, and therefore, very little injury results from this method. (from New Agriculture Network on-line newsletter available at <http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/#3>)

Organic Food – Is it better?

By Hugh Martin, Organic Crop Production Program Lead, OMAFRA

Periodically I get asked this question and here are a couple links to new studies on the issues by the Organic Center. These reports are fairly large to download (not recommended for dial-up).

- **"Simplifying the Pesticide Risk Equation: The Organic Option"**
The potential to reduce pesticide dietary risks through organic food and farming is quantified through analysis of USDA residue data and EPA pesticide risk assessment methods.
http://www.organic-center.org/science.latest.php?action=view&report_id=125 (49 page PDF, 18 MB)
- **"New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods," State of Science Review, March 2008**
Major new report comparing the nutrient content in conventional and organic foods, based on the findings of 97 published, peer-reviewed studies.
http://www.organic-center.org/science.latest.php?action=view&report_id=126 (53 page PDF, 19.5 MB)

Links to Organic Agriculture Information

OMAFRA Organic Website

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html>

Ontario CSA Farm Directory Now Online

This is an excellent directory for Community Supported/Shared Agriculture farms in Ontario. Visit the Ontario CSA Directory website at <http://csafarms.netcompass.ca> and discover a local source for your produce.

Organic Apple Production Guide for Atlantic Canada 2008 (PDF, 7 MB)

A very useful resource for apple producers in many areas of Eastern North America, including Ontario.
http://www.organiccentre.ca/Docs/OrganicAppleProd08_e.pdf

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