

The Canadian Organic Grower

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Cover photo: The adult Syrphid fly (hover fly) is a valuable pollinator. Larval Syrphids devour soft-bodied insects, such as aphids.

Photo credit: Elizabeth Cronin with thanks to Linda Gilkeson.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Organic consumption

"Cut your spending – save the world," read the headline in the *Globe and Mail*. I spotted this while tidying up and realized I was stacking papers I hadn't finished and probably wouldn't get a chance to read: material that went from tree to print and will be recycled without being read.

The members of Canadian Organic Growers are an ecologically conscious and responsible lot. We know that shopping just for the sake of it leads to a waste of natural resources; overflowing landfills; and pollution from the manufacture, shipping and disposal of products. But what about organic consumption?

Sometimes it's a challenge to winnow the truth from the marketing.

As editor, I receive promotional material from various companies that want free advertising. I get catalogues from big box stores announcing the latest line of gas-guzzling garden tools. I get press releases about sprays that can kill any living creature unfortunate enough to land in your garden (well, maybe not your garden, but in the gardens where chemicals reign). I get folders of information about farm shows, garden expos and agricultural fairs. Lately, I've been getting something new—glossy catalogues filled with airbrushed skinny women sporting organic

clothing.

Before recycling these catalogues, I flip through them and end up with mixed feelings ... like how I feel when I see Californian organic lettuce at the supermarket in July.

Of course, it is great to see a demand for organic cotton. Every time a major retailer decides to sell organic clothing, the acreage of organic cotton increases. Conventional cotton is usually heavily sprayed, genetically engineered and grown in huge monocultures. Organic cotton is a wonderful alternative.

Then why am I bothered by these catalogues, as I am by organic cake mixes made with white flour and white sugar, and the picture-perfect organic food imported from around the world? To me, these reflect both the success and the failure of the organic movement.

We've succeeded at getting more people interested in organics but have they changed their buying habits? Does it matter whether an organic product is needed or not, or if it helps the local community? Do we consider the environmental cost of a product—from growing, processing, shipping, using and eventually disposing of it?

I think that many people care about these issues. But sometimes it's a challenge to know what to do, and to be able to winnow the truth from the marketing. Perhaps this is the role of organics—to bring the farmer's face and the planet into the decision.

This issue focuses on "growing companions." Initially we thought the pages would be filled with

articles about beneficial organisms, but we expanded it to include the people who help us garden, including children and apprentices. I would like to go even further and suggest that the people who eat organic food are also our growing companions. From soil fungi to honeybees, to apprentices to customers at the farmers' market—organic farming is a relationship with the earth and its inhabitants.

Perhaps this is the role of organics—to bring the farmer's face and the planet into the decision.

I hope that people who buy organic cotton clothing don't feel the need to replace it every season as fashions change (though this does mean more organic clothing in the used clothing stores where I shop!). I hope that people who buy the imported organic food also support local farmers by going to a farmers' market or joining a CSA. And I hope we all cut our spending on things that don't matter but invest in what does—nourishing food, local communities, and a healthy environment.

—Janet Wallace
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What do you think? We welcome your letters.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It has been said that good leaders take their people where they want to go.

Great leaders take their people where they ought to go.

I believe this concept can apply to organizations as well as individuals. I believe Canadian Organic Growers (COG), through our board, chapters and individual members, should strive to provide that kind of leadership to the organic community.

We need to provide leadership in educating and indeed challenging the consumers in this country to take charge of their food supply.

COG is doing this with our brilliant concept of "Growing Up Organic" as we work to introduce organic food into daycares (see page 9).

COG can do this by educating government, consumers and ourselves as to the benefits of organic and localized food production and consumption in terms of health, the environment and sustainability.

COG can do this by educating consumers as to the unsustainability of the Wal-Martization of the organic food systems.

We need to provide that kind of leadership in defining and defending our organic standards against forces within and outside the organic sector who would compromise our fundamental organic principles for convenience or profit.

COG can do this by supporting and strengthening our developing organic organizations such as the Organic Federation of Canada and the Organic Roundtable.

COG can do this by continuing to play a leadership role on the Canadian General Standards Board Working Committee on Organic Agriculture

COG can do this by recognizing that the organic community is essentially a grassroots movement and we need to provide leadership in developing structures that nurture the involvement of the grassroots in the decision-making process.

We need to provide leadership by "being at the table" to advance the organic perspective on issues of the day. A good example would be my involvement in the Seed and Fertilization Modernization Workshop in April.

As individuals, we can all provide that kind of leadership by example. I believe the most powerful franchise we have is our spending power. As individuals, producers and consumers, we can vote with our feet and our dollars as we support direct farmers' sales, farmers' markets, CSAs, etc., and buy organic and local food as much as possible.

Lastly, on behalf of all COG members I'd like to extend our sincere thank you to our Past President Janine Gibson who provided us with great leadership for the last six years. I will be relying on her a great deal for advice as she continues on the board as our past president.

—Arnold Taylor
President

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