



Comments on Organic label is misleading consumers -
www.thestar.com/article/188974

They published about half of [the letter below]. They also printed a correction that some of the items listed as pesticides were in fact micro nutrients.

Bob Kennedy

-----Original Message-----

From: COG Toronto [<mailto:torontochapter@cog.ca>]

Sent: Friday, March 09, 2007 10:13 AM

To: lettertoed@thestar.ca

Subject: Comments on Organic label is misleading consumers -
www.thestar.com/article/188974

It was unfortunate that Suzanne Carere hadn't done a bit more research before writing her article "Organic label is misleading consumers". It would in fact have been a wonderful opportunity to introduce consumers of organic foods to the new legislation that was passed on December 14, 2006 giving the force of law to the designation organic. Suzanne is quite right that the unregulated organic certification process has frustrated consumers and producers alike for years and it has taken a long time to get the government of Canada to react. But they finally recognized the important role that the growth of the organic industry represents to Canadian agriculture and after a great deal of consultation, they delivered a piece of legislation that does a reasonable job satisfying all who are involved.

Suzanne also failed to mention the great lengths to which the organic movement has gone over the past 30 years to create a dependable certification system that consumers can trust. While there are many certifying bodies, this is because most of them are regional. There is an overall umbrella organization called IFOAM that insures organic standards are internationally co-ordinated and similarly interpreted. This is particularly important with produce originating from the developing world where public trust has often been skeptical.

It is important to understand that the Canadian Organic Standard is a minimum standard. (You can find it at <http://canadagazette.gc.ca/partII/2006/20061221-x6/html/extra-e.html>). Organic certifiers are free to adopt even more stringent standards if they so choose. For example, Rotenone use is largely restricted in the Canadian legislation but many certifiers forbid its use entirely. Actually, most of

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the substances that Suzanne calls organically approved pesticides are actually micronutrients that both plants and humans need. Only copper and sulphur (which themselves are micronutrients) are allowed at larger doses in very restricted circumstances to combat fungus. The rest of her list actually documents elements that are only approved in the Canadian Organic Standards for use as additions to the soil in areas of documented nutrient deficiency. In these cases, organic farmers are strongly encouraged to use natural soil amendments that contain these compounds in low, slowly released amounts. There is no allowance for elemental molybdenum, selenium or cobalt in the Canadian Organic Standards. See

http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/032_0311_2006-e.pdf

Alan Graziano's comments about non-certified local "organic" producers reflects the supply problem that organics currently faces. Because of high demand, many local farmers find that they are able to grow their produce with organic methods and sell all of it locally at farmers markets without having to go through the hassle of certification and without bothering with a retailer such as Mr. Graziano. It means that there has to be a level of trust between the farmer and the consumer and it is important to ensure that both share the same interpretation of the term organic. Soon, the uncertified use of the term organic will be illegal and they will have to rely on terms such as natural or free-range to designate their products.

It is expensive to be organically certified and more importantly, it is very time consuming. An organic certifier does more than just audit and analyze for pesticide, chemical fertilizer or antibiotic use. The certifier inspects the entire running of the farm, and grades it on things such as the land management, crop rotation, treatment of livestock, and processing of wastes. A farmer can lose his organic designation for his farming practices as well as for using pesticides when not permitted. For some farmers, this can be a real hassle, but most value the input and advice.

Some good sources of current information on organics in Canada are Julie Danylik, nutritionist at the Big Carrot on Danforth

<http://www.thebigcarrot.ca/>; Larry Lenhardt of OCPP/Pro-Cert Organic Certifiers in Lindsay <http://www.ocpro.ca/index.php?p=2742>; and Laura Telford, national administrator Canadian Organic Growers <http://cog.ca/contact.htm>

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