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Proof in the pudding

The numbers said it all. Over 400 people turned out to attend Eco-Farm Day in Cornwall. They came from nearby United Counties, from Quebec and from as far away as Lindsay and beyond.

They included old-time homesteaders, politicians, entrepreneurs, mainstream agriculturalists, a new generation of hippy look-alikes and families with children who were present and expectant mothers.

The conference, which started years ago as a creation of the Canadian Organic Growers, to inform and inspire organic producers and conventional producers who were transitioning into organics, has evolved into a major event.

According to conference president Tom Manley, Eco-Farm Day attendance has grown from about 150 when the event was held at the Operating Engineers Training Institute in Morrisburg, to the point where it has reached its maximum capacity for the present venue at the Ramada Inn.

One reason for the increased attendance is a recognition of the growing market for organic products, as consumers become aware of the importance of naturally produced foods, and of value versus quantity.

Not the least among the incentives for this changing mindset among producers are the financial rewards to be obtained by growing organic products, which are often double the price or more of conventional ones.

But the benefits are also gratifying from a psychological viewpoint. As keynote speaker Eliot Coleman and several others observed, the ability to grow food without the input of synthetic chemicals, genetic modification, artificial hormones and antibiotics, and their negative effects on health and the environment gives great satisfaction.

The delicious taste of fresh organic products brimming with vitamins and minerals, untouched by man-made chemicals is enough to convince the most skeptical of consumers that we are eating healthier fare. There is an old saying that the proof is in the pudding and in this instance, it could literally be true.

The fact that some techniques of organic agriculture date back to the nineteenth century and earlier gives it even more credibility as a science. Experience has proven these methods work and do so efficiently, without a great deal of unnecessary expense.

Of all the values to be obtained from growing organics, perhaps the most precious is the independence to be gained, when one works with the land according to natural, scientific principles, rather than relying on synthetic chemicals produced by large corporations.

That independence comes from supplying a most important basic need, and being able to do it cheaply with materials that are on hand.

And successful organic farmers not only can feed themselves, but they also make a living from their products. In this case, self-sufficiency is its own reward.

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