

*Caring for the Land:
25 Years of Ecological Farming*

by Diane Baltaz



The Ecological Farmers Association
of Ontario
2004

1979-1983 The Natural Farmers Association

“We felt that we had to try to grow safer food ...” Alvin Filsinger

The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) came about because Thomas Herbert Eldridge wanted to share knowledge about ecological farming methods with like-minded farmers in Ontario.

Herb, as he was then called, had transformed a 200-acre plot of “burned out cash crop corn land” he bought near Ethel in Huron County for \$30,000 in 1973. Through composting, cover crops and other ecologically sound methods, this former Saskatchewan farm boy and IBM computer programmer said that he had “grass growing” on the land by 1975 and, with time, cattle.

While it satisfied Herb to see the land regenerate, he was vexed that he had to mainly rely upon foreign publications such as *Acres* and the Rodale books for information. It was the 1970s, long after the Green Revolution of the previous generation had convinced most Ontario farmers that one could not grow bountiful crops without keeping the latest copy of the provincial *Guide To Chemical Weed Control* within grabbing range. According to Herb, “The...information [from the American publications] was good, but it was more for southern climates. We needed more regional information.”

Moreover, their minority existence made alternative farmers the pariahs in rural areas: “I was the laughing stock of the local farm community,” said Herb. “For example, if I went into the hardware store, and people would ask, ‘Hey! Are you spraying yet, Herb?’” As a result, Herb sought out like-minded farmers. Some of these people were local, notably Sharon and Bob Boylan of Ethel, from whom he bought a milk cow, and Ken Gascho of Zurich, who had farmed organically since 1964. But Herb travelled as far as New York State for shop talk.



This photo of Herb Eldridge appeared in the *Rural Voice* in November, 1980.

Ayton-area apple grower Alvin Filsinger became Herb's central contact person. Alvin had farmed chemical-free since 1954 (or 53), making him Ontario's veteran alternative farmer. In 1964, Alvin and his wife opened an on-farm health food store in addition to selling minerals and other organic crop materials, making him a magnet for all like-minded farmers.

Alvin connected Herb with a small but informal network of alternative farmers, the kind whom he called, "genuine salt of the earth organic farmers — they never did anything else." Herb's growing list of contacts had 20 names on it by 1978. "It seemed like a lot of names, eh?" said Herb. "And I thought, hey! There are enough names here; why not organize a group?"

Herb chose the Linwood Community Centre as the site of his new group's charter meeting. He did so at the suggestion of two organic Old Order Mennonite farmers who were interested in attending, but could not travel too far by horse. While there is no written record of the exact date in the EFAO archives, the meeting occurred early in 1979, and Herb claims that all 20 of the farmers who were invited came. The day began with Herb and a Quebec soils specialist named Joe Smillie talking about soil and crop rotations. People brought bagged lunches. There was no full program and no one kept minutes.

After the information sessions, participants agreed that they should create an association which would provide opportunities for them to share and develop their knowledge about ecological farming practices. They called themselves the Natural Farmers Association (NFA), a name apparently suggested by Herb. Those present elected Herb as the group's first president, membership secretary and newsletter editor because, says Herb, "There were no contenders then."

There was an informal board of directors during those early days, but Herb and others agree that they served in an advisory capacity to suggest farm tours and other educational matters. According to Lawrence Andres who, with his wife Mathilde, became involved with the NFA almost immediately upon moving from Switzerland to their dairy-cash crop operation near Tiverton, "Herb organized events himself and the directors only gave a few ideas. The Natural Farmers Association was Herb's own idea."

Those charter years followed a format which remains relatively unchanged: an annual meeting and conference which took place in the early spring, quarterly newsletters and at least one farm tour for members to observe practical applications of soil tillage, green manures, composting, cover crops, livestock management, conservation practices and other relevant practices. The membership fee was \$5, with funds financing newsletter costs and other promotional activities.

Soon, the membership grew to 30 names. When Herb pinned members' locations onto a map of Ontario, he discovered that his farm in Ethel formed the nucleus of the organization, with the other locations being equidistant to him. The association was largely a mid-western Ontario group, although Herb notes that they did have an "eastern member in the early 1980s" when a Peterborough-area farmer took out a membership "around the 40-member mark." The group also had "a supportive OMAF (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food) member, Garry Lean." Garry eventually became an organic certification inspector.

With time, the day-long annual meeting and conference moved to the Ethel Central Public School, according to Sharon Boylan, who had attended the charter meeting in 1979. Members willingly volunteered their farms for tours and membership increased. Although there is disagreement by charter members about how quickly the NFA grew in its first five years, there were at least 50 members by 1982.

Early names of farm tour hosts included Ken Gascho, Hugh Johnson and Bill Pullen, both of Huron County (Bill now lives in Grey County), and Herb's neighbour, Lyle Martin. Norm Alexander became involved with some soil demonstrations in Huron County, and Alvin Filsinger, together with Grant Snell of Londesboro, served as early directors. Tony McQuail of Lucknow, new to mid-western Ontario and, in Herb's words, "the youngest of the lot," was also an active member.

Although the number of members was increasing, the natural farmers were still very much a minority. During this time, for example, Herb was invited by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to represent the alternative view on regional farmers' panels, which still favoured the industrial farming bias. Herb says that one city daily newspaper "humiliated" him with a headline which read, "Organic Farmer Says Seeds Have Life." The actual article made his statement sound ridiculous.

The NFA remained a relatively small but growing farmers' support group. The earliest record of



Lyle Martin and friends



L-R Norm Alexander chats with Bernhard Hack

the NFA in the Ecological Farmers' Association of Ontario archives in Wroxeter are two undated, stapled producers' directories with handwritten covers. The oldest directory listed the following farmers: Alex Caron, RR 3, King City; Herb Eldridge, Anbros Farms of Tiverton (the Andres); Norm Lemont of Cargill, and a "Joe Doe of No Name, Ontario". "There were only eight or nine of us who were interested in growing organically," says Sharon Boylan, who, with her husband Bob, grew organic crops for their dairy cows and, like Herb, believed in no other way to farm.

The second directory sold for \$1 and listed 14 "organic farmers" selling goods such as rye, worm castings, soft winter wheat, Saanen dairy goats (a Burk's Falls breeder), soybeans, popcorn, eggs and vegetables. The number of members grew in part due to the immigration of people such as Bernhard Hack, Michael Schmidt and Lawrence and Mathilde Andres to Canada. Alvin Filsinger credits these peoples' previous knowledge of organic growing on large-scale farms for attracting more attention to the viability of organic growing here in Ontario.

Reflection of the Times

The Natural Farmers Association started as a member-run group because there was little outside interest in alternative agriculture. All of the early members who were interviewed emphasized that there was no research into alternative farming practices in the 1970s and early 1980s other than their own—a prime incentive for hosting the annual farm tours and conferences. The stories these members tell of those early days paint a picture that makes it easy to understand why the creation of the NFA was such an important event.

The commitment NFA members made to prove that one could coax crops from the land by working with natural systems, rather than against them, was reflected by the dollar investments they made for on-farm research trials. This continues to be true today. Alvin Filsinger, for example, estimates that he has spent \$100,000 of his own funds on research since the time he purchased the family farm in 1953.

Like Herb, Alvin felt ostracised by his peers in his early days: "People came over to stare [at my crops]. I had a lot of people who made fun of me—all of their comments were sarcastic. But deep down in my heart I knew I was right. I saw what [had] happened to my parents' farm since 1934, when...a fertiliser man sold us 2:12:6 CIL fertiliser..." That year's oats and barley crops grew much higher, with more bushels per acre. That prompted his mother to fertilize her garden, only to see the soil develop a cement-like quality when she hand-

dug the soil the following year. Soil tilth in the fields declined as well, and soil ran off to a neighbour's line fence during a heavy thunderstorm.

Later converts to alternative farming frequently have similar testimonials about why they switched from conventional methods. But in the 1970s there were few public examples of farmers' negative experiences with petroleum-based fertilizers and biocides, and few opportunities for farmers to share their experiences other than at places such as the Filsinger's Ayton farm store or through chance encounters with folks such as Herb Eldridge. Rachel Carson's 1964 *Silent Spring* brought the Western World's attention to the ecological hazards of DDT, and should have raised a red flag about the impact of other pesticides. But, as the Natural Farmers Association charter members' recollections reveal, the dominant food system was too entrenched in the scientific "progress" of its time.

Despite the current image of the 1960s and early 1970s as having been the age of alternative thinking, Herb indicates that during his pre-Ethel career, when he worked for IBM in Toronto, he had difficulty locating health food, as such stores were uncommon. Herb thus grew as much of his own food as possible. He says that his neighbours at the time considered composting practices such a novelty that they threw bags of leaves over his fence to supplement his compost, rather than have the city truck them away as rubbish.

Alvin Filsinger remembers his wife receiving criticism for giving "health advice" at their on-farm store, since it was considered to be the exclusive domain of scientifically-trained doctors. Her advice was suggesting that one take blackstrap molasses to counteract iron deficiencies. In fact, the jailing of a Hamilton-area health food store owner for such "advice" spurred the creation of the Canadian Health Food Association in the 1960s.

Ken Gascho's story is also a reflection of the times. Ken bought the farm that he currently lives on in 1948. Now 80, he says that he initially went along with the dominant thinking because, "first they introduced 2,4D, then DDT and the other chemicals, and their popularity grew by leaps and bounds...Everyone was sold on it and to step back people would [have thought] that you were peculiar." The death of his 42-year old sister on the home farm jolted Ken out of this brief fling with chemical agriculture. Questioning the cause of her premature death caused him to re-think how "progress" was ruining both personal and environmental health and led him to implicate the lindane diffusers they used in the barn to control insects. Although it is still used today on crops such as cacao, lindane is now known to be an endocrine disruptor that persists in the environment.

The literature that he collected on lindane and DDT convinced him to return to the original, organic route in 1964, in spite of the widespread peer pressure to continue with the “conventional route.” “They [DDT and lindane] destroyed her immune system,” says Ken about the progress of his sister’s cancer. “The cancer first appeared in her muscles. I read that’s where the effects of DDT and lindane first appear, because of the neurological damage they cause. Then it went to her lungs... Yet everybody thought that they were safe. They didn’t know that the DDT gets stored in the body. I should never have gone into chemicals.”

Such dilemmas concerned the NFA membership as much as their desire to share their on-farm research trials: “We felt we had to try and grow safer food,” says Alvin.

The lack of established markets for alternative farmers provided another incentive for them to unite. Sharon Boylan recalls that Herb and other NFA members had difficulty selling organic red meat in nearby urban centres because the premium price turned many people off. The public concern about the impact that hormones, antibiotics, heavy metals—and other products found in common food products—was not as prevalent as it is today. Sharon says that these marketing difficulties likely resulted in the production of the two NFA Producers Directories.

The fellowship and mutual support was as critical as the information gathering. “I was happy about the Natural Farmers Association from the start,” says Ken. “I didn’t have the courage to do it [start an association] myself, although I’ve been practising [a natural approach] since 1964.” Ken remembers meeting Herb after he (Ken) wrote a letter to the editor about organic farming in the *Acres* newspaper. “Herb came to my farm to meet me. (Ken laughs softly at this point.) I think he never thought that anyone [else] was doing this in Canada until he read my letter in the paper.”

Concurrent Movements

It is said that a good idea often springs up in more than one place at once. Such was the case with movements that were supportive of the Natural Farmers Association.

Like the NFA, the Canadian Organic Growers Association (COG) was also established in the mid-1970s. COG records reveal that founder Peter McQueen was a 16-year-old Toronto high school student when some teachers and students at his school discussed the need for an organic farmers’ and gardeners’ group. They too began with a different name: The Organic Gardeners and Farmers Association (OGFA). Three people attended the first meeting, held in 1975. The

special Fall, 1995 issue of *Cognition*, COG's official magazine, states that OGFA attracted 50 members in 1976 after hosting three public lectures, a farm tour and involvement in several festivals. Their first newsletter came out "in purple ditto" in 1977.

Herb Eldridge says that Peter McQueen invited him to speak at the OGFA's first public meeting. "Peter McQueen had a different way of proceeding (to start COG) than the Natural Farmers Association. I organized people (for the charter NFA meeting) and then started the group; Peter had the idea and then had to find the people."

Not long after, in the early 1980s, a handful of agricultural students at the University of Guelph became disgruntled with their curriculum. They found the course material to be too reductionist and too geared to only ever-greater production. For them, farming had to give up its chemical fixations, research had to become more land-focussed and be done hand in hand with farmers, not in laboratories and university trial plots, and farming had to work with nature's rhythms, not against them.

In 1982, with the help of a few like-minded campus staffers such as Henry Koch of the Guelph Arboretum, these students invited organic farmers and alternative farming experts from across the continent to a "conference" in one of the university's classrooms. They called themselves and the conference, Guelph Agricultural Alternatives (now known as the Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference). Like the initial meeting of both the NFA and of COG, the first Agricultural Alternatives conference attendance was small. Today, the conference is the largest organic agriculture conference and trade show in Canada and among the four largest in North America.

Despite slow starts and name changes, both the Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference and Canadian Organic Growers grew, and their relationships with the EFAO continue into current times.

Growth of the Natural Farmers Association

Since the membership and their concerns about food safety and the need for shared, on-farm research clearly existed, why did the NFA not materialize until 1979?

Lawrence Andres credits the association's foundation in 1979 with good historical timing.

Lawrence and his two best-known fellow immigrant farmers, Bernhard Hack and Michael Schmidt, arrived in mid-western Ontario at a time when alternative farming on a large scale was relatively unheard of. According to Lawrence: “Bernhard Hack and Michael Schmidt proved that organic farming works on a big scale—they did it in Europe where it worked for decades. Here, there was only Oak Manor Farms (which went organic in 1972) and Alvin Filsinger, but it never picked up here as it did in Europe. Everyone was just waiting for something to happen. Then there was an explosion which shows that the timing was right. If it [the founding of the NFA] had happened 10 years earlier, it would not have [worked]...I just feel that he [Herb] was needed to get it going. We were busy trying to make our farms go and we were too busy to do that [organize the NFA].”

But the “explosion” that Lawrence speaks about almost never happened. The association was too dependent upon Herb to run things during its first three promising years. Thus in 1982, when personal problems of a divorce and then a farm sale forced Herb to suspend his extra-curricular activities, the Natural Farmers Association almost folded into nothingness.

Subsequent Organic Farm Demonstrations Weren't like This One!

Early NFA field trips focussed largely on crop rotations and soil composition. Sharon Boylan remembers one involving a wet, five-acre portion at the front of their dairy farm. A Kitchener distributor of a natural products company had a soil conditioner called “Basic 8” which he said would “make water wetter” and thus dry up fields faster. Thus, he held an autumn demonstration to show the product’s efficacy. “He poured gallons of the conditioner on the field and the field was not drying up, so he stopped,” said Sharon. But the demonstration wasn’t futile in the long run. Sharon said that the wet spot where the Basic 8 went not only produced the most attractive grass for their cows, but it remained green when summer drought browned the rest of the field. The Boylans used the product until they sold the farm in 1986.

1983-1993 The Ecological Farming Boom

The Natural Farmers Association lay dormant during the time that Herb Eldridge's farm was up for sale. No newsletters came from Ethel, nor were there any field tours or conferences for members to share shop talk. Some members openly wondered what they were getting for their annual dues—or whether they paid them at all, as they were often paid at the late winter conference. Presumably, everyone was too busy farming to do more than ponder the NFA's potential death by dormancy.

Fortunately, in 1983, Lawrence Andres stepped in. "I met Herb's neighbour, Lyle Martin," says Lawrence. "I heard that Herb couldn't continue the Natural Farmers Association—it was dormant. There were no activities and the whole thing was crumbling, and people were not renewing their memberships, or maybe a handful were paid up compared with 20, 30 members when things were going well....When I heard that Herb was calling it quits, I said, 'Hey! This is too good a thing to let go.' Mattie was there too, and we agreed, we had to revive it."

Lawrence went to Herb Eldridge's home, offered to take over the operation of the NFA's activities and became its next president. Mathilde, or "Mattie," doubled as treasurer and as newsletter editor. Herb remembers this transition well: "With the divorce and the farm sale, the newsletter was dormant for a year, and that is when Lawrence Andres got involved. Lawrence was the first European organic farmer to come who knew what he was doing; then Bernhard Hack came. Lawrence got involved pretty quickly. He offered to take over. I gave him all of the (NFA) papers and newsletters, and with his wife, he published the newsletters."

The previous advisory board of directors had dissipated, thus, the association's nerve centre simply moved northwesterly to the Anbros Farm's kitchen table near Tiverton, in Bruce County. Its actual revival came with the newsletter, which Mathilde produced in the illustrated, stapled booklet format that was used for years afterwards.

The real renaissance came in the spring of 1983 with a joint forum at the Ethel Central School which the NFA organized as a joint venture with David Reibling of Oak Manor Farms in Tavistock. The Reibling family had practised organic farming techniques on their cash crop operation since 1973 (others say 1969), becoming known boosters of this movement with the establishment of their subsequent milling operation. They had developed a comprehensive

mailing list of interested farmers that complemented the NFA membership list.

Records of the exact conference materials are sketchy—Dave recalls that it was on crop and soil matters. Also, the chief organizer of the conference was an employee of Oak Manor Farms, Tomas Nimmo, who has since moved on to organizing organic events such as the Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference, as well as the 2002 conference of IFOAM (the International Federation of Organic Movements) in Victoria, British Columbia.

According to Tomas, the jointly-sponsored event was “just a natural progression” for both groups. Oak Manor Farms, for instance, did the promotional work, having previously held open houses for people interested in ecological farming. “There was a competition to see whose [mailing] list drew the most farmers to Ethel.”

Attendance at the event was somewhere between 120 to 150 people. Michigan soils specialist, Joe Scrimger, who has since returned to Ontario to speak at other organic events, was one of the main speakers. Students from the Guelph Agricultural Alternatives group attended, and Hugh Martin of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) was present, among others. The Pfenning (another now prominent name) of Baden, also attended; as recent arrivals from Germany, they were “keen” on learning what was evolving in Canada.

While no one knows, or will admit to, which mailing list lured the most farmers, the Ethel conference revitalized and consolidated the ecological farm movement in Ontario, enabling it to move forward more energetically than before. Within a year of the NFA’s dormant period, the organization boasted 145 members. “We were bombarded with membership,” says Lawrence Andres. “It was really because farmers—practical farmers—took it [membership].”

The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario name becomes official

The association’s name changed to the Ecological Farmers Association by the winter of 1983/84. “Mattie and I wanted it changed, as the Natural Farmers Association was too broad a term,” explains Lawrence. “Herb [had] liked that name and nobody argued with him. We were determined to do away with the Natural Farmers Association name after the first year.”

The Armow Short Course

The EFAO's next leap was its launch of an introductory "ecological agriculture course" that was held in the spring of 1984 in Armow, Huron County. According to Lawrence, workshop co-presenters Bernhard Hack and Michael Schmidt planned a two-day program that could be done in a weekend, and dealt with basic topics such as soil and animal health, crop rotations and other basics. Moreover, Lawrence claims that they organized it within three weeks, from the mailing of the promotional flyers, to booking the hall, to the course content, to the actual event.

Lawrence recalls the success of the course: "Eighty people registered within a week. And the course was overfull as there were over 100 in that room. We had Larry Lenhardt come from Sir Sanford Fleming College [where he taught agriculture]. It was a two-day course, so we billeted farmers, had motel rooms booked, and full course meals were supplied. They [participants] only paid \$20 each for the whole course and we had financed it with what we got. We even found money for the motel. Yet we had \$800 left over. People were just tickled pink. It was just unbelievable and of course we were fired up about it."

Thus began the first modern ecological agriculture "course" in Ontario. Like the farm tours, this weekend workshop became an annual event in both mid-western Ontario, and soon after, further east in Omeme (between Lindsay and Peterborough), Lindsay, and Kemptville. The association ran the courses until OATI (Ontario Agricultural Training Institute) took over the course in 1996.

In the May, 1988 newsletter, Mathilde Andres described the "Armow Short Course," as it was dubbed, with this observation:

The Armow Short Course owed a lot of its success to the participants themselves. Not only did the speaker introduce a wealth of experience in organic growing to the meeting, but the audience too, actively participated with questions and examples of ideas which worked on their farms.



Bernhard Hack on a farm tour in Germany

Veteran EFAO members today speak glowingly about the influence that these 1980s weekend workshops and farm tours had on their farming careers. Some sample testimonials follow:

I never thought that I could make a go of organic farming until I took an EFAO weekend workshop at the Armow schoolhouse.

I saw Bernhard Hack standing there, holding on to soil from his own farm, with tears running down his face. That prompted me to go back home and take a closer look at my own soil....

We [a husband and wife team] grew corn, and spraying Atrazine was the worst part. We sprayed for three, four years. We couldn't sleep thinking about it and we both agreed about this. Then we read a feature story about Lawrence Andres' farm, and that inspired us to take the introductory course on ecological agriculture and that cured our insomnia.

God always led us to the right people at the right time and the EFAO was one of them.

Sample newsletter illustrates nature of the fledgling EFAO

One of the earliest EFAO newsletters in the association's archives in Wroxeter is a September, 1985 newsletter edited by Mathilde Andres. The cover of the 12-page newsletter features a woodcut sketch of a man and woman picking apples. The inside cover states these details about the association:

Association members are entitled to take part in four or five meetings per year. Members also receive the association newsletter. The annual membership fee is \$15.00. For more information, contact Lawrence Andres, c/o Anbros Farms Inc., RR 1 Tiverton, Ont. NOG 2TO.

The next page features a note by Mathilde explaining the lack of a summer newsletter that year, because of the busyness of farm life during the summer. As editor, she promised that she would try to issue the future editions on a quarterly basis, with this one consisting exclusively of material contributed by other people (which was not always the case!). The articles included two by Sally Gower, outlining plans by the Organic Food Production Association of North America (OFPANA), an umbrella organization of producers, distributors and retailers in the US who hoped to have a certification programme in place by 1986, as well as an article outlining the definition of organic, based upon the standards of the

International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM). Gower's first article mentioned that Lawrence Andres attended OFPAN's third organizational meeting in Toronto that year, joining the organization on behalf of the EFAO.

Charlie Grant reported on the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA), whose Ontario chapter was in the process of formation. Murray Bast wrote about the impact of soil moulds on crops and on livestock. David Walton did an opinion piece about the need for members to publicly speak out on any form of environmental degradation, because:

Our organisation is (I hope) comprised of people concerned about the future health of this planet as a whole. We should be concerned for our air, water and land as well as the plants and animals....We should not only speak out but offer some solutions to problems such as garbage disposal....

Announcements from other groups became part of the information sharing that remains typical of EFAO newsletters. This archived, 1985 issue publicized a conference on politics of global food production and distribution that was being held at the University of Toronto. Mathilde snuck in two paragraphs about the health benefits of junipers and raspberries upon human health, and an ice cream recipe by Grant Snell of Londesboro was that issue's regular members' recipe.

About this time, the Board developed the Association's Statement of Purpose. Still in use today, with only minor changes of wording, it outlines why the Association was established in 1979 (helping members develop ecological farming methods, education, linking these people to share experiences, and creating farmer-consumer links, etc.) and what activities it pursues to meet the Association's goals. The Statement of Purpose became the focus of early membership brochures and by 1989, was printed inside every newsletter. (See the appendix for a copy of this Statement.)



EFAO farm tour, summer 1988

The Association membership grew throughout the 1980s. According to Lawrence, the membership roster rose to 800 names at one point. The group periodically assumed several extra events beyond the conference, farm tours and the organic agriculture course. In spring, 1986, for instance, Bernhard Hack offered an EFAO workshop on bio-dynamic gardening, with information on soil composts, high, low and medium-feeding crops and various soil builders necessary for garden rotations.

Farm Advisory Visits

The success of the Armow short course generated many requests for on-farm consultations from the graduates. After some "intense discussion" at the 1987 autumn conference about the expenses such visits might incur, EFAO directors agreed to provide consultations *gratis* to members for the first, on-farm visit. Advisors were paid a per diem fee plus expenses from EFAO funds in order for them to hire some help to make up for the time missed on their own farms.

The February, 1988 newsletter explained the situation:

Since the beginning those who have experience in organic farming have freely offered their help and advice to others who are just starting ... this approach to food production. With a small membership this was manageable by the handful of experienced organic farmers who were the heart of the association. Now we have over 400 members, many of whom are eager to have someone visit their farms to advise them. Those called upon to help have found their time stretched to the limit so that they must hire extra help to keep their own farms operating.

Regarding offers by some members to pay a fee for this on-farm service, the newsletter explained that "this [was] against the feelings of those giving the advice. Our organisation is unique in that the flow of information has always been offered freely." In other words, the EFAO's *raison d'être* became more deeply entrenched, for despite rising governmental talk about the potential of ecological agriculture, the source of sound information remained at the farm level.

The EFAO remained a staff-less, volunteer-driven group. Thus, the escalating popularity of the advisory service kept the advisors busy: the May, 1988 newsletter reported that the advisors had received 200 requests for advisory visits so far that year. But membership fees remained at \$15, and while the EFAO had a bank balance of \$3,550 as of January, 1988, the expense of the visits as well as the demand upon the advisors prompted the EFAO to seek out additional help in terms of outside funding, including "no strings attached" funds from various levels of government.

Before year's end, the EFAO's two prayers were answered. Firstly, the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) of Wroxeter agreed to coordinate the consultation service for the EFAO. The authority designated MVCA staffer Phil Beard, then an EFAO liaison-director, as the programme's co-coordinator. Secondly, Environment Canada donated \$3,000 towards

financing the consultation costs.

Some Concurrent Trends in Ontario

Provincially, interest in organic farming grew alongside of the membership of the EFAO. For example, OCIA's Ontario committee certified 14 farms in 1986 alone.

The "alar scare" of 1987 created new levels of consumer and producer conversations about food quality in Canada. Alar, used to spray red apples, was declared carcinogenic by several American and Canadian agencies, including the Canadian Cancer Society. Although there had been other news stories about pesticide toxicity in the 1980s (e.g., the 1985 government bans on Alachlor and a biocide called 2,4,5-T, a compound of Agent Orange), this story became front page news because noted Hollywood actress Meryl Streep made the Alar-on-apples issue a personal cause. The resulting publicity resulted in drastic reductions of apple and cider sales across Canada and prompted more consumers, and at least several industrial farmers, to consider eating or growing organic products—or at least consider meeting the rising public demand for reduced pesticide usage. Indeed, an Agriculture Canada poll at that time revealed that 80% of Canadians would have liked to see organic food on store shelves.

On Convincing the Government and the Farm Media

While news such as the Alar scare may have raised consumer consciousness about the state of the Canadian food system, its long-term impact upon the *status quo* remained debatable. Nevertheless, the EFAO faithfully voiced its message to the various powers with differing degrees of success.

In 1988, after several years of lobby work, directors Ted Zettel and Lawrence Andres convinced OMAF to change the title of their annual publication, *Guide to Chemical Weed Control*, to *A Guide To Weed Control*. Better still, the Ministry began a new section which described non-chemical methods for controlling weeds. In what some directors called "the biggest breakthrough ever for the EFAO," OMAF declared it would use material submitted by Ted and Lawrence for their 1990 publication. Methods suggested by these two directors included crop rotations, pre-emergent or "blind" harrowing, scuffling, mechanical control of quack grass, and use of the rotary hoe. Mathilde published the original document that the two directors had presented to OMAF in the November, 1988 newsletter.

Meanwhile, Mike Pembry of Terra Cotta challenged the mainstream farm media about their predilection for ignoring the EFAO. At the annual conference of the Canadian Farm Writers Association (CFWA) in Toronto in November, 1989, Mike organized a panel featuring a certified organic farmer from North Dakota, Gerry Poechman of Hanover, and, at the CFWA's request, University of Guelph academic and ecological agriculture-friendly Gerrit Hofstra to speak on organic farming.

Mike told the CFWA that the EFAO had nearly 700 members, and held several introductory courses annually, four farm tours, and a conference annually. But although the conference had representatives from all segments of the farm media present, only two hands went up when he asked whether any of them attended any of these events—one was Tomas Nimmo, an EFAO member, the other, a former member. "The reason for this is...that most of the farm press is supported by advertising from agribusiness and the EFAO is trying to help its members reduce the number of purchased inputs," Mike explained later in the December, 1989 newsletter.

The question-and-answer period that followed the panel's discussion revealed so much interest by the journalists that they continued even when they heard that the next speaker, federal agriculture minister Don Mazankowski, had arrived and was waiting to talk! Despite this interest, the EFAO publicity machine generally continued to rely upon their local media, which was (and continues to be) less dependent upon advertising by agri-input firms.

Organizational Developments

The EFAO's own annual general meetings remained informal, with most of them occurring at the Grey Central School in Ethel with either catering provided by members or "potluck picnics." Mathilde's report of the 1986 general meeting revealed a different location, one which provided a casual flavour to association business:

On August 17, 1986, we held our General Meeting on the farm of Ken Gascho and family in Zurich. About 100 people gathered there on a sunny Sunday to have a look at the farm, talk and enjoy a picnic. For the general meeting we gathered under the trees and a few general remarks were made about our organization. Bernhard Hack and Mike Pembry were elected as new directors. Except [for] Helen Yeoman, who moved to Vancouver well over a year ago, all other directors remain the same.

That January, 1987 issue did not list the other directors, but Lawrence remained president, with Mathilde still labouring as treasurer and as newsletter editor—although biodynamic farm enthusiast Mike Pembry was now assisting with the mailing list for the newsletter. Mike eventually became the newsletter editor; Lawrence says that Mike “came in around the 350-member mark, when it was difficult for us to hand-address newsletter envelopes from our kitchen table any more.”

In the mid-1980s, Ted Zettel of Chepstow began a 10-year post as the EFAO’s publicity director, while his friend, Gerry Poechman, similarly got involved in activities such as speaking on “tillage and soil conservation” at the organic agriculture course, and chairing the committee for farm tours. By 1992, Steve Hasbury did the computer mailing list from Kincardine, before Tony McQuail took over as membership secretary.

The February, 1989 newsletter listed the following directors: Lawrence Andres, Bernhard Hack, Tony McQuail, Ted Zettel, with Phil Beard on the board as the MVCA liaison and Mike Pembry as newsletter editor. By winter, 1991, Ken deBoer of Lucknow, Brian Jeffray of Wingham and Dave Kea of Beaverton added their names to the directors’ roster.

EFAO happenings as the 1990s approached....

EFAO directors connected members with various appropriate international events during their education and networking activities. One example was Tony and Fran McQuail’s decision to add an ecumenical, Environmental Sabbath service to their Sunday, June 5, 1988 farm tour based on the United Nations environmental program. The UN had created the Environmental Sabbath as a means of uniting environmental and religious communities throughout the world. Its purpose was to promote concern for the earth while creating a new vision of earth-human relations to inspire future directions. As part of their local adaptation, the McQuails invited Bill Jongejan, president of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, to speak at the morning service, followed by a picnic and a tour of their 100-acre livestock, mixed grain and apple operation.

Other farm tours that year remained within mid-western Ontario. The Andres and Hack farms remained popular educational sites. A change of venue and theme came with the tour of Carl Cosack’s Peace Valley Ranch, near Shelburne. That farm was a large commercial beef operation that was struggling to be as organic as possible. The May, 1988 newsletter observed that the Cosacks’ additive-free beef was creating some friction with conventional cattlemen as they (the Cosacks) claimed that they could compete at normal market prices.

The advertisement for the December 3, 1988 autumn conference at Ethel Public School proves that this event was still an intellectually diverse bargain. Its registration fee was \$3 for members; \$6 for non-members, including lunch. The speakers and panelists included Bernhard Hack on "Soil Conditioning to Control Weeds"; Dr. Peter Langer on "Parabiologics—an approach to Mastitis control"; and a panel on "Making the Switch to Organics" featuring Ted Zettel (Chepstow), Jim Ferris and John McKinnon of Tiverton, and Fred Linder of Gadshill.

By the winter of 1989/90 the MVCA had developed a resource library on ecological farming, and had made this material available to EFAO members. These resources included a video of the introductory course on agriculture that Phil Beard taped, with other videos and related journals being added with time. In 1993, the MVCA and EFAO re-organized this "lending library" to include 15 different subject areas including ecology, composting and nutrient management, natural areas, cover crops, and rural sociology.

In 1989, the membership fee rose to \$20 in order to meet rising costs. This may be why some members at the previous fall conference convinced the board of directors to sell life time memberships. The amount had not been settled by the time this news was published in the February, 1989 newsletter. But it was to be somewhere between \$150 to \$200, which the editor observed is "certainly a good buy if you are 20, and a worthy donation if you are 90."

The newsletter added a new member service: in-house classified advertising in a page entitled, "The Stock Exchange". As stated in the February, 1989 newsletter:

the directors have decided that we ...would be interested in helping fellow members who have farm to farm products to sell such as grain, livestock and perhaps used machinery...There is no charge for this advertising but it is restricted to farmer to farmer trade. Others advertising may be considered in the future but the detractors are having a hard time deciding how they would discriminate for or against products which may or may not blend in with the philosophy of our organisation.

This feature also created more work, and by 1993, the Board appointed director Shelly Paulocik of Bluevale as assistant editor.

The Board of Directors repeatedly received suggestions that the organization become linked with other groups, such as becoming an affiliate member of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. By 1988 the directors declared in their newsletter their rejection of such suggestions:

At the moment we have decided that we should work with any group which is interested in what we are doing, but without becoming a member of any one. We are not a political organisation and the directors are concerned that linking ourselves directly with any organisation could lead us in a different direction.

There were a number of relevant projects by other groups for the EFAO or its members to officially or unofficially co-operate on. Examples include public relations-outreach activities, such as sharing a booth with the MVCA at the 1993 International Plowing Match in Walkerton, or support of the non profit-research group, REAP Canada Inc. (Resource Efficient Agricultural Production) with agrologist Roger Sampson, which appealed to the EFAO's lust for sustainable research. EFAO member Jeff Quinn of Middlesex County personally participated in some on-farm experiments sponsored by REAP, and later reported on his experiences during the 1989 EFAO conference in Ethel.

In 1989, the EFAO gave their blessings to the nearly 40 growers who bought a grain elevator owned by Michael Schmidt to form an organic growers' grain and beans marketing co-operative. Many of these co-op participants were EFAO members. OntarBio, as it became known, eventually expanded to processing organic milk. Besides raising the profile of organic cash crops in the province, such enterprises provided additional marketing outlets for EFAO families.

Many EFAO members raised their eyebrows at the end of 1990 when Tony McQuail took a leave of absence from the EFAO Board of Directors for a unique personal reason. The provincial NDP, under the leadership of Bob Rae, had ousted the incumbent David Peterson government at Queen's Park. The new cabinet appointed Tony, a long-time member of that party, to be the parliamentary assistant to agriculture Minister Elmer Buchanan. This appointment gave much reason for members to quip about having a "pro-organic plant at OMAF" to reform provincial agricultural policy!

Time for Internal Reflection

By the early 1990s, the EFAO had grown to the point where they became involved in various negotiations with other groups and with governmental advisory committees. The most notable example, in 1992, was the association's decision to co-sponsor the Organic Agriculture Conference at the University of Guelph. The conference, then in its twelfth year, had grown too large for the Guelph Agriculture Alternatives student group to run by themselves. Co-sponsors were

Canadian Organic Growers, the Society for Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening In Ontario, OCIA and OMAF.

Despite this type of success, membership levels dropped from the record high of 800 before levelling off and then increasing at a slower pace. The reasons for this decrease in membership varied from folks simply not paying their membership dues while still being on the earlier rosters to the waning of the initial flush of widespread enthusiasm that usually accompanies many movements during their early days. Yet because the public still equated the Association with the Ontario organic movement, the Board was periodically approached by academics and others wanting to contrast members' farming practices, economic viability and spiritualities with conventional, industrial farmers (Stonehouse, Kneen, Hall & Ver).

For this reason, the Board of Directors considered whether or not they should assume a more official status by becoming a chartered, non-profit group or perhaps, a corporation. Through the newsletter, they sought members with legal expertise with which they could explore this direction. The board also presented a constitution and by-laws at the November 14, 1992 annual general meeting and conference at the Grey Central School, Ethel.

The demographics of folks who joined the EFAO expanded. The Association's introductory courses in Lindsay and Kemptville added more Central and Eastern Ontario postal codes to the mailing list. More women became actively involved in association activities (three of the eight directors in 1993 were women). Thus, an official children's program got added into the annual meeting by 1993, so that entire families could attend. And more smaller-scale farmers and market gardeners got involved, especially when the CSA or "community-supported agriculture" movement took hold in Ontario right in the traditional EFAO heartland.



1992 Board of Directors. L-R Back row: Lawrence Andres, Ted Zettel, Ken deBoer, Phil Beard, Gerald Poechman, Russ C (facilitator), Front row: Mike Pembry, Mathilde Andres, Lawrence Andres.



1993 Board of Directors. L-R Back row: Lawrence Andres, Ted Zettel, Tony McQuail, Chris Hoskins, Harold Saunders. Front row: Bob Budd, Rita Stoller, Shelly Paulocik, Ruth Knight.

In September, 1993, Toronto food activist and EFAO member Brewster Kneen, and Ken Maltby, an OMAF specialist in direct farm marketing, asked the EFAO directors to let the Association become a resource centre for information on CSA projects throughout Canada. It meant that the EFAO would act as an information gatherer and as a national clearing house on CSAs in Canada. The board sounded out the membership for their reactions to this proposed workload, with director Ruth Knight of Clifford being the contact person.

Anecdotally, members remember 1992 as the wettest crop year on record. In the spring of that same year, the Directors took an intensive, two-day retreat-workshop in order to forge some definite directions to present to the membership. Using the mission statement as their centrepiece, the Board wrote in the autumn newsletter:

The EFAO's reason for being is to help motivate and inspire farmers to educate themselves about a holistic approach to farming. Education is the key ingredient for fulfilling this role. Disseminating ideas, helping with problems, sharing information, supporting each other and networking are some education methods. Farmer-to-farmer education and mutual support describes this approach.

The directors also felt, that although the EFAO has had an impressive impact, more could be done by better organisation of the membership and spreading the activity.... Communication of this leadership vision will be key to recruiting further participation of members.

The CSA Movement

The CSA movement began in 1990 when Bob and Bev Budd offered the use of their farm in Goderich Township to Dave Parsons. A Canadian who had previously worked at a CSA operation in the United States, Dave wanted to start one in Canada. A group of 8 or 12 people, including the Budds and Tony and Fran McQuail, became charter shareholders. The Budds took over the original CSA in 1992, and Fran eventually began her own CSA. By then, the CSA's concept of close producer-consumer interactions with up-front investment, and shared risk, and the potential for family members to get involved in this labour-intensive sideline had sired a minor boom of CSAs elsewhere in Ontario, especially near urban centres.

AN EFAO Farm VISIT

Editor's note: the following article is a journal description of an overnight farm visit which Bernhard Hack made in mid-February, 1991. The Jesuit-owned beef-apple farm, Ignatius Farm in Guelph Township, was a partially organic farm at the time, growing crops without fertilisers, but they still practised conventional orchard management. The farm at that time had some interest in biodynamic farming, which the EFAO did not officially offer, but was espoused by Bernhard. The entire farm is now organic, and has participated in on-farm organic crop trials with the University of Guelph. The following diary entry is reprinted with permission of the author.

Bernhard Hack of Kincardine Township, who is involved with the ...Ecological Farmers Association, came in his famous *lederhosen* on Thursday evening. An overnight roomie for Mike [who lived on the farm]. Bernhard was to discuss bio-dynamic farming on Friday, and diagnose [the farm manager] Don's basic farm problems (e.g., composting manure, etc.)

Bernhard was on the farm several years earlier... As one person who is doing his best to counter the fact that agriculture is the largest non-point polluter in North America, it was good to have him back. He's quick to point out truths such as how our use of the term, "environment", compared with the former term "nature" or the earlier term "creation" which was used more commonly 150 years ago goes to show how far we've moved away from our relationship with the Creator and with creation.

It will be interesting to see what changes result from Bernhard's parley with Don. For instance, Bernhard does not believe in silage: "It's an artificial means of feeding cattle which was not done 150 years ago...all of the silos on my farm are empty."

He says that our hay yields would be higher if we time out their cutting better. And he insists that you don't need corn, PERIOD [his emphasis]. He said, "After soybeans, corn is the worst crop to grow—it leaves behind less organic matter than it takes ...and you harvest it late in the autumn—when the ground is wet and this causes compaction of the soil."

Thistle is a symptom of compaction. Wild mustard (a major problem in last year's corn crop) either results from fertiliser (too much) or from applying sour manure. He does not have a cure for Colorado potato beetles, but he noticed that potatoes growing on

unfertilised ground (even without compost) doesn't attract beetles, or it attracts predators which feed on the eggs.

Apple orchards can be converted to biodynamic ways in a year. Pruned branches can be shredded and kept underneath the trees, and not hauled off to Sleepy Hollow [a spot on the farm where tree prunings were dumped]. It returns organic matter and is also a disease preventative. This is hard to explain [what Bernhard said] but the branches' fungi, etc. produces antibiotics which are good for fighting off some diseases. And colour, taste, should improve noticeably too once we convert, compared with [the orchard manager's] theory that our trees need chemicals "because of all of the pollution from Highway 6."

We will not grow corn this coming season, and we will focus on the orchard. Bernhard's visit definitely leaves an impact upon us here at Ignatius Farm....

1994-2004 Highlighting the “O” in EFAO

During the early 1990s discernment process, the Association mailed a membership survey to 387 homes. Two hundred copies were returned and studied by survey coordinator Ruth Knight, who published its findings in the spring, 1994 newsletter.

Ruth's findings revealed that about 80% of the membership farmed, with slightly over half of them doing so on a full-time basis. The others were either part-time or retired farmers with a minority being urban educators and others who were interested in farmer-eater links. Two-thirds of the members were aged between 30-50 years, a surprisingly high percentage in a profession where most practitioners hovered at or near the retirement age. And while nearly every county south of Sudbury harboured EFAO members, the bulk existed in the counties of Grey, Bruce, Perth, Wellington and Huron (approximately 40%), with a smaller nucleus in Eastern Ontario.

Most of the 1993 respondents had a post-secondary education, although not necessarily in agriculture. They reported several avenues which led them to the Association: reading about it, personal introductions through friends or neighbours, the Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference, or through related associations such as Canadian Organic Growers or the Society for Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening in Ontario. Most of the respondents had participated in or benefited from the advisory visits, summer farm tours, and the quarterly newsletter, as well as the regional introductory courses. The lending library got honourable mention.

Yet not all of the members were purely “organic” in the commonly-understood sense of the word. Many were in transition or were interested in following suit. The Association's mandate of bringing such people together to observe and share expertise on practical applications of green manures, crop rotations, livestock management and other ecological farming necessities had knitted together a diverse, but concerned group of farmers.

The survey must have challenged Ruth Knight's analysis team. Shelly Paulocik reported a hodge podge of tentative suggestions in the fall, 1993 newsletter. Members asked for meetings in diverse locations within Ontario (depending upon the respondent's postal code), and offered conflicting comments about whether or not they would attend Sunday events. Many made suggestions for workshops and newsletter articles; one respondent simply wanted to receive renewal notices, while another member suggested that the Association get more information out via e-mail, which was then a relatively new phenomenon.

Still, the final results gave the Directors further fodder to present at the November 13, 1993 annual meeting. The Association's wide geographic range, coupled with the previous call for increased member participation encouraged this conference theme: "Building Local Organizational Networks."

That year's meeting began with Lawrence Andres speaking on "Why the EFAO needs a local farmer network." Following him with two keynote addresses that day was Nancy Matheson of the Montana-based Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO). Founded during the 1970s energy crisis, AERO was a nonprofit membership group that improved members, communities and the environment through renewable energy, conservation, sustainable agriculture and greater community self-reliance. The purpose of establishing local organizational networks in Ontario was to encourage EFAO members who lived close to each other to form regional networks and work together to learn more about ecological farming. Such groups would reaffirm the original EFAO mandate of farmer-to-farmer sharing and education.

With Eastern and Central Ontario eager for more participation in their areas, EFAO member Rita Stoller of Seeley's Bay (in the Kemptville area) outlined the workings of a local network in her region. Ted Zettel identified logical geographic areas, resources, potential organizers and their relationship to the Board of Directors.

New President, New Changes, Same Famous EFAO Fellowship

The membership at that pivotal meeting in Ethel in 1993 agreed that greater localization, or having "local kitchen meetings," was necessary for the Association's maturation. Members also saw Lawrence Andres step off the Board of Directors. As he said years later, "After 10.5 years as president, it was time to let go."

The Board of Directors in 1994 consisted of the following people: Tony McQuail, President; Ted Zettel (public relations); Ruth Knight (treasurer); Shelly Paulocik (newsletter editor); Chris Hoskins (secretary, advisory service at MVCA); Bob Budd, CSAs; Harold Saunders (tours, CSAs); and Hubert Earl and Rita Stoller who became the first "Eastern directors."

Although the mailing address for correspondence and membership renewals moved to the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority's post office box in Wroxeter, a three-year contract with MVCA for using the part-time services of MVCA staffer Ron Strome ended as there was

no funding to sustain the position. Ron had organized the EFAO display panel, done the previously-mentioned reorganization of the library, helped with a membership survey, dealt with queries, written newsletter items, and done some publicity.

The Board sought to operate on a greater cost recovery basis by the arrival of the 1995 growing season. Ergo, the Association began charging a flat fee of \$75 per farm for on-farm consultations. Because the consultation usually took two to four hours, it was still a bargain. The Stock Exchange page in the newsletter began charging a \$5 fee per issue. Advertising between members continued to grow. The Board also recommended that the 1995 membership fees be raised to \$25; \$65 for three years.

In addition, the Directors again discussed the provincial stable funding issue. A provincial initiative launched by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) in the late 1980s, allowed farmers to “check off,” or direct, the farm rebate portion of the Ontario section of one’s income-tax return to go to an approved general farm association. This provided “stable funding” to farm organizations, made one a member of whichever association she or he chose, and gave the farm organization more lobby power. At that time, the only two approved associations were the OFA and the CFFO, although registration numbers suggested that the EFAO was a comparably large association. Participation by the EFAO in the initiative did not occur until after months of debate in the Ontario farm community—a debate which resulted in the government giving farmers the option of sending their rebate to a designated “charity.” Of course, EFAO members were encouraged to designate the EFAO!



Fran and Tony
McQuail

Trans-Ontario Farm Tours Become Standard

The regional farm tours went well in 1994. In the “Western Region,” members ventured into the Niagara Peninsula to the Tom and Mary Anne Neufeld farm near Tintern, which had open-pollinated corn, hay, rye, hard and soft wheat, double-drilled barley, a market garden operation, pigs and a small sausage operation. Henry Koch of the Arboretum at the University of Guelph, who worked with the EFAO on naturalisation issues, invited members to tour his workplace. Martin and Corrie Pronk of Harriston hosted a workshop, “Integrating Agriculture and Ecology on the Farm,” with a plant ecologist, a stream ecologist and a landscape

ecologist, walking 30 people through the farm. The tour's purpose was to show that ecological farming involved more than simply managing the agricultural land on the farm using organic or biodynamic methods, but that farmers needed to learn how to look after the forests, fens, bogs, marshes or rivers as well as the aquatic life, birds and wildlife that live on the farm. These aspects of creation too constituted part of the farm's ecosystem and they felt it was vital to understand how they fit into the landscape ecology in which the farm was situated. The majority of previous farm tours had merely looked at the agricultural land while neglecting the natural areas, birds and wildlife that also constitute a farm's ecosystem and are often valued by farmers.

In Eastern Ontario, people examined the Bruce and Janet Duncan dairy farm near Almonte, as well as the dairy farm operated by Hubert and Helen Earl near Addison, the latter ending with a pork BBQ. Then there was the value-added tour at Pine Hedges Farm, operated by Anton, Edith and Joseph Heinzle—in addition to growing flax, they produced organic yoghurt and kefir.

Fewer farm tours and workshops were held in 1995, although the tours that did happen and the newsletter remained as key activities. Mike Beretta, who then farmed near Wingham, took over *EFAO News*, the newsletter. Plans were made for an advanced ecological agriculture course due to demand.

Specialised theme workshops, such as a workhorse workshop at the McQuail Farm in April 1996, and one on wind and solar energy production applications at Ferndale with member Ziggy Kleinau (founder of Citizens For Renewable Energy) and other experts, attracted some members' attentions.

At year's end, the Directors were: Tony McQuail, Ted Zettel, Harold Saunders, Rita Stoller, Hubert Earl (still in their original positions), Janet Boot, Clinton; Marilew Albrecht of Clifford (Treasurer), Mike Beretta (editor); Peter Leahy, Duoro (Central Ontario) and Chris Hoskins (MVCA liaison, secretary).

In 1996, massive cutbacks in the funding which the provincial Conservatives made to conservation authorities left the EFAO sweating about their partnership with the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority. As a result of the cutbacks, the MVCA-EFAO terminated the CSA resource centre in 1996, after nearly three years of existence. The centre eventually found a new home with the Ecological Agriculture Project at MacDonald College at McGill University. The MVCA still provided space and assistance for the lending library, board meetings, mail and advisory requests. But they lost Chris Hoskins as secretary, because he could only come into

the office to answer mail and phone inquiries once a week. Phil Beard returned as the MVCA contact person.

Formalizing of the Introduction to Ecological Farming Course

Phil Beard remembers two significant events that occurred during the mid-1990s. One dealt with the takeover of the original “Armow short course” by the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI) in 1996. Phil documents it like this:

OATI approached EFAO and offered funding to develop the course and expand its application. The course took the information that had been delivered orally and put it down into written form for course participants to take home. This reduced the amount of writing that the course participants had to do. The course was developed into a manual and other instructors from the EFAO were recruited and trained to deliver the material. This helped take the strain off the few people who were teaching the course (Ted Zettel, Lawrence Andres, Gerald Poechman, Bernhard Hack, etc.)

Phil also remembers another important development—a joint effort by the University of Guelph, EFAO and MVCA to create an *Agro Ecological Farm Planning Manual*:

This manual provided a guide book for farmers who took the introductory course to develop an ecological farm plan for their farm. So they could take the ideas and information learned at the introductory course and put them on paper when they got home. This manual was then developed and tested on eight EFAO member farms. The manual helps farmers get a better understanding of the ecology of their farm and looks at the natural areas, water courses, wildlife and agricultural land on the farm as part of a system. This manual is still used today and takes a systems approach to the farm planning which is what ecology is all about.

In addition, during the mid-1990s, OATI funded the EFAO to develop a “Renewable Energy on the Farm” course. Developed by Tony McQuail, it includes a course manual and guide book. Phil notes that, “With the rise in energy prices, this course may become more in demand in the next few years.”

Still Speaking Out About Conventional Trends

Lobbying the Ministry of Agriculture remained a priority. In the mid-1990s, the Province of

Ontario planned to reduce the use of biocides by 50% by 2002 AD. It complemented the “Farm Environmental Plans” promoted by the OFA and the farm commodity coalition, AgCare. When the ministry boasted that the province was already reducing the gross weight of pesticides, the EFAO returned the provincial stats with some noteworthy observations. First, the reduction mainly dealt with two crops: tobacco (16% of total pesticide use), a non-food crop that grows on only .76% of land devoted to agriculture; and soybeans, where changes in pesticide chemistry had resulted in smaller doses of the active ingredient providing the same toxic punch. The EFAO observed that: “The hectares of soybeans treated with pesticides actually increased 28% from 1988 to 1993. The total tonnes of pesticides used [had] dropped from 7201.4 in 1988 to 6246.4 in 1993, but at the same time, pesticide application on fruits and vegetables increased from 994.9 tonnes to 1034.7 tonne. The biggest increase in pesticide use [had] been on grain crops while the biggest decrease occurred with canola, both as hectares sprayed and in kilograms applied per hectare.”

Grain crops showed the biggest increase while canola showed the biggest decrease, both as hectares sprayed and kilograms of pesticides per hectare. In a brief to the Ministry, the EFAO pointed out that grain crops showed “an alarming increase in both the percentage of the crop sprayed (up from 67.2% to 81%) and the rate of application (up 23%).” This was especially alarming since this was “a class of crops which are one of the easiest to manage organically.” They also encouraged the Ministry to “use the experience of organic and ecological farmers in Ontario who have already developed farming systems that operate successfully with reduced or no chemical inputs and represent most of the commodities produced in Ontario; [to] develop university and college courses in organic farming systems; [to] use the money now directed to the Grower Pesticide Safety Course to educate farmers about nonchemical alternatives; [and to] tackle the biggest users of pesticides—corn growers at 38.6% of all pesticides used in agriculture . . .”

1997 – a new logo and the 15th Ecological Agriculture Symposium

The Association had its fun moments as well. For instance, it sponsored a logo contest, challenging members to convey their perception of the EFAO’s *raison d’être* in a compact symbol. At least a dozen entries came in. The winner was Marilew Albrecht who drew a pair of hands reverently holding a soil and a fledging plant, surrounded by the association’s name and acronym.

Also, Tomas Nimmo convinced the EFAO Board of Directors to hold a “symposium” at a formal conference centre in lieu of the annual conference at Ethel. He felt that having a more

central location in Ontario would attract more than the usual Midwestern Ontario members as well. The result: the “15th Ecological Agricultural Symposium,” held in Orangeville on November 15, with the theme, “Feeding Ourselves and the Community.”

While subsequent annual symposia reverted to simpler meeting hall venues, there were two significant results from the Orangeville meeting, one being that the number of directors on the Board rose to a record 15 people. Also, Hubert Earl became the Association’s first president from Eastern Ontario. Predictably, in his acceptance speech, Hugh lauded the large number of directors—proof that the EFAO had members willing to work for the betterment of the ecological farming movement.

During Hugh’s term of office (1997-1999), the EFAO officially divided their membership area into three regions: Western, Central and Eastern. Each region struck their own committees to deal with local issues, tours and promotions, and to host a regional symposium. The regional committees took turns hosting the provincial annual general meeting. Each committee had representation on the provincial board which managed the affairs of the association as a whole.

The three regions roughly broke down this way: Western, which includes all counties west of Highway 400, including Simcoe County and the Niagara Peninsula; Central, which is not as clearly defined, due to lesser concentrations of members, but includes towns such as Madoc, Stirling, Prince Edward County, etc.; and Eastern, which includes all counties in the Ottawa-Kingston-Brockville area.

Hubert’s past exemplifies how many full-time farmers happened to embrace alternative agriculture. As a farm-raised person, Hubert said that he had “always wanted to farm and set the world on fire.” So, he bought his current farm near Addison, worked hard, and had the top-producing dairy herd in his county for eight years. But he still felt dissatisfied. He likes to say that he “leaped cold turkey” into organic agriculture after meeting Alvin Filsinger in 1976, later adding a market gardening operation and an on-farm store. Although jumping in “cold turkey” is not the recommended route, his newfound challenges in farming turned him into one of his area code’s most enthusiastic boosters of organic agriculture.

In 2003, Simcoe County area residents met to form their own county EFAO network, calling themselves the Simcoe County and Area EFAO Network and becoming a “chapter” under the Western Region. Chris Litser was its first chair, with Pat File as the secretary. Not all members of the chapter were EFAO members, although they were encouraged to join.

Such regional designations helped with local marketing. For instance, Western Region produced a “Producers and Products Directory”, a brochure of producers in Brant, Oxford, Middlesex Counties, and the traditional mid-western Ontario area who sold directly to the public. Products varied from meat, eggs, vegetables, CSAs, fruit, and preserves, to sheep skins and some cash crops. The guide was included in the 2002 newsletter, and was distributed at regional shows and in similar places.

Volunteers from the Central Region assembled an impressive display at the 2002 Hastings County Farm Show & Plowing Match. It included an old Farmall tractor (which attracted the tractor enthusiasts), a 10-foot portable greenhouse frame lent by Hilltop Pastures, a dump trailer with the EFAO banner firmly attached to it, and a 2-metre table filled with crop samples, produce, environmental farming information, and the usual EFAO display panels.

The Eastern Region developed very region-specific conferences, often holding them at the Community Christian Reformed Church north of Iroquois. The program for their November 23, 2002 meeting gives an idea of the matters discussed, and included: a slide show about the “many facets of agriculture throughout the world” by Tom Manley of Homestead Organics, Berwick; a talk by John Slack of Spanish River Carbonatite, on the geology and history of Eastern Ontario’s soils; a talk by Gord Hawkes of Log Cabin Orchard, on apple management; an organic lunch (provided), followed by the annual general meeting; and an open forum—a time to share experiences, ask questions or express concerns (this also was, and continues to be, a popular part of the other regional meetings!).

At the provincial level, Don Blakney of Dundalk took over the editorship of the newsletter, until cancer forced him to resign. He was replaced by Colin Isaacs in 2003; Shelley Paulocik was the assistant editor. The newsletters were thick and usually had more than one-half dozen contributors per issue. By then, membership fees were \$30 or \$75 for three years.

There is one dolorous footnote about this energetic period: in 1997, Bernhard Hack died of an illness, after having been in the former Soviet Union where he was introducing people to organic farming. His death caused a flurry of tributes. As one person who benefited from his work-

shops said, "If Bernhard did not have an answer to a problem on your farm, NO ONE could help you."

Organic Agriculture Comes of Age

The dawn of the twenty-first century created feelings of new beginnings among alternative farmers as much as it did among Canadians in general—even though all the labours and challenges of 1999 simply carried over. But there was evidence that organics had at least entrenched itself within Ontario.

Although ecological agriculture still represented less than three per cent of overall Canadian agricultural production, the demand for organic domestic and export products rose by about 20% per year. Indeed, major urban supermarket stores had introduced organic product sections, sometimes carrying regional products, such as Oak Manor Farms flour and organic milk products from Ontario and other organic dairies that had emerged in western and eastern Ontario. Since 1988, the Canadian government had worked with certification groups to establish common organic standards (albeit with lots of frustrations and on-and-off again financial help).

But the happiest news occurred when the Ontario Agriculture College announced that they were starting an organic agriculture credit course under the supervision of Guelph professor Ann Clark, whose organic-friendly papers were often linked through the EFAO web site. Despite years of lobbying by groups such as the EFAO and Canadian Organic Growers, the final push had come from a petition of the Agricultural Alternatives student group. Predictably, the campus relied upon feedback from EFAO members while drawing up course content.

About the same time, the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC), based at the Nova Scotia Agriculture College in Truro, Nova Scotia, developed four web-based credit courses on the internet. OACC is a national centre for education and research committed to assisting organic farmers and those making the transition to get access to the expertise and technology that they need. The first two courses, offered between September 5 and December 19, 2002 were, "Transition to Organic Agriculture" and "Composting Skills." They were followed in the winter term with courses on organic field crop and livestock management. The EFAO advertised these courses under the "other events" listings in their newsletters, giving the OACC web site (www.organicagcentre.ca) as the contact information.

The celebratory spirit of the times was best portrayed by Tony McQuail at the 20th Or-

ganic Agriculture Conference in 2001. Tony introduced Dr. Clark, the keynote speaker, to 1,000 registered participants, making the event Canada's largest organic conference and trade show, and one of the largest on the continent.

In his introduction, Tony spoke about the growth of the organic movement from a scattered bunch of 25 farmers 26 years earlier to a network of farmers who had become "a yeast in the leaven"—letting their shared, collective knowledge spread throughout a more socially and ecologically aware society. In his words, "We live in a broader social context and the concept of sustainability is becoming better understood...I think we in the organic movement are in a very powerful position to talk about not only the dis-economies of scale but also, and worse, the dis-ecologies of scale."

At this conference, rumblings grew about the need for a united voice within the Canadian organic community to deal with the government on a number of issues, from genetically-modified foods, to the development of uniform Organic Standards, to research, education, and marketing priorities. With financial help from Agriculture Canada, some teleconferences were organized to investigate the formation of a national coalition. The EFAO was among the Ontario representatives.

By then, Fran McQuail had assumed the EFAO presidency. While she had always actively worked in the background, Fran says that she did not assume greater leadership positions in the Association earlier because parenting had demanded the bulk of her energies. Her two-year presidency had its own demands—the debate on genetically-modified food had intensified. Organic farmers had been pointing out red flags raised by GMOs since the mid-1990s, but the dominant media ignored them; by 2000, the Council of Canadians and other groups brought the issue to the public media as a new development by transnational corporations. And there were increasing collaborations with other groups, such as regional workshops with the National Farmers Union, COG and various county organizations.

With the members still relying upon each other for technical expertise to deal with the fineries of alternative farming, the EFAO, OntarBio Co-op and the MVCA began to seek out funding for a "technical co-ordinator" to strengthen the farm advisory service.

Growing Organic Agriculture Project

In 1999, with help from the MVCA, these groups sought funding to hire a technical support person for what they dubbed the "Growing Organic Agriculture Project." The Ontario

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the provincial program, Healthy Futures, turned down the funding application. Although funding was incomplete by 2001, OntarBio wanted to forge ahead. Thus, in March 2000, they hired Annette Verhagen, a former OMAFRA advisor whose previous experience included the Guelph International Resource Centre, CUSO, Ontario Public Interest Research Group and, in 1988, the Agricultural Alternatives group in Guelph.

Annette worked part time in June, became full time in July, 2001, and through funding from the Laidlaw and Schad Foundations was still on staff in 2004. A desired needs survey never materialized as a result of the annual funding crunches, and the demand for farm technical assistance did not become as great as the three hiring groups anticipated. However, with her assistance, the EFAO continued to update the lending library—organizing, retrieving books, videos articles—as well as organizing farm tours and answering the EFAO hot line at the MVCA office. Annette also created a media kit to go out to local media along with announcements about area farm tours, and she worked on the various marketing brochures.

Writes Annette about the demands of the EFAO in her summer, 2002 newsletter report:

The organic advisory service has slowed down . . . Marketing is one of our bigger challenges, since regular advertising is expensive. We are reaching our targets but many of those calls go directly to a few farm advisors and not through the EFAO phone line.

The Board of Directors in autumn, 2001 consisted of: Fran McQuail (president); Ken Laing (vice president, Elgin County); Rob Wallbridge (secretary, Williamsburg); Janet Duncan (treasurer, Almonte); Steve Martin, (Clifford); Martin Krol (Williamstown); Henry Ellenberger (Stirling); Jenny Keith (Picton); and Robert Conover (Bewdley).

Expanding Representation at Provincial and National Levels

When Ken Laing became president in 2002, the EFAO served as the Ontario representative in the afore-mentioned organizational teleconferences for the national organic coalition. This was the latest and more detailed carryover of previous efforts by organic and certification groups



A farm tour at Ken Laing's.

across Canada to create common organic standards. As the EFAO representative, Ken wrote in his "Ruminations From the Back 40" report in the summer, 2002 newsletter:

On the last teleconference in April 2002, nine people from across Canada representing BC, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, PEI, Quebec, COG and AFFC (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) managed to choose a name, "Canadian National Organic Coalition: and proposed the membership be made up of one member from a representative-organisation in each province, one representative each from OTA (Organic Trade Association Caucus), COG, organic academic community, certifiers and AFFAC....Much remains to be organised and implemented and funding will be a major challenge. It is sort of like sitting down to watch a tree grow, there are periods of growth and dormancy, but over the years the tree grows bigger and matures and serves its many functions in the world around it.

The coalition officially began on January 2, 2003, when funding from the Organic Sector Development Program and industry partners became available. Since then, the Canadian National Organic Coalition (CNOC) has held more conference calls and email discussions. It is a group of representatives from every province, and representatives from the Organic Trade Association, COG, the Canadian Health Food Association, and the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada. An important committee is its ad hoc Organic Food Regulatory Committee which does whatever is necessary to implement a regulatory program for Canadian organics, working with provincial and federal government bodies. The EFAO represents Ontario on this committee¹.

Regionally, the Western Committee wrote a draft policy on genetically modified organisms for the EFAO, publishing it in the Summer, 2002 newsletter prior to final approval by the provincial board. Lakeside-area sheep farmer and market gardener Ann Slater and Larry Bender of Tavistock did much of the legwork. The policy was subsequently approved and was made available to interested persons.

The statement, which said that the EFAO had 500 member families, called for a moratorium on further release of GM plants, animals or other life forms, mandatory labelling of all food containing GM ingredients, a full environmental assessment of the impact of GMOs on the food web, implementation of recommendations which the Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel on the Future of Food Biotechnology released in 2001, and calls for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to have a "clear separation between the scientific assessment and economic promotion of GMOs."

During this period, some people were warning about the impact that an increased public demand for, and marketing of, organic food might have on costs, in order for organics to become acceptable and popular. Concerns included issues such as whether or not consolidation and the shift from small production to large-scale production are inevitable, and whether or not organic producers must mimick their conventional marketing counterparts. These issues created much discourse not only at the 2002 Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference, and the 2002 IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Movements) conference held in Victoria, B.C. (attended by various EFAO representatives), but also at the EFAO Western Committee annual general meeting. At the latter event, Veronika Mogyorody and Allan Hall, both of the University of Windsor, released the findings of a three-year study they had done on organic farmers in the province, many of whom were EFAO members. The tension between providing a counter-cultural alternative to a mainstream marketing system consisting of large-scale farms and globalized market places, in which farmers would be small- to medium-scale and more community-based, remains today.

Other new movements, as well as existing commitments, kept members working at a grassroots level. In her spring, 2004 EFAO Board Report, president Ann Slater reported that the EFAO had representation on both the provincial and national levels in organizations such as the National Organic Regulatory Committee, the Ontario Organic Round Table, the Guelph Organic Agriculture Conference committee, the Ontario Environmental Network, and the Organic Research Meeting. She also noted that the EFAO was receiving an increasing number of requests for support for organic research projects. "With our charitable status, we are helping the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada access foundation funding for a research project on Control of Gastrointestinal Parasites in Organic Livestock."

She also commented on the regional committee projects:

In the East, kitchen table meetings [were held] over the winter months. Central region is looking into cooperative marketing and working with like-minded groups to take action against GE wheat. Citizen groups and cottage groups along the Lake Huron shore have been raising concerns about water contamination from agriculture. In response the Western Committee is inviting these groups on an ecological farm tour. A Simcoe County mentoring-farm tour program for the coming season is innovative and much in keeping with the spirit of EFAO.

In 2004, the EFAO remains as active as ever. The major event is the Association's 25th anniversary, centring around a banquet and annual general meeting in Listowel, on November 6.

A founders' farm tour, sweatshirts, fund raisers, and participation in the 2004 Outdoor Farm Show in Oxford County have also been part of the year's activities.

The EFAO also registered an internet domain for a new website, set up by member Doug Freeborn of Wydex Acres Farm, near Listowel. The newsletters are thick, the spring issue having 38 pages with listings of many farm tours, library resources, member profiles, articles by members such as Fran McQuail and Chris Boettcher and three by long-time supporter and the OMAFRA representative for the Organic Agriculture Conference committee, Hugh Martin.

Continued funding from the Laidlaw Foundation has kept Annette Verhagen in the office, as well as some federal funding that was obtained with assistance from EFAO ally Dr. Ralph Martin of the Organic Agriculture Centre. The Toronto Community Foundation gave \$10,000, thanks to a donor interested in organic agriculture. Writes Annette in her Spring, 2004 newsletter report:

...we have friends in organic agriculture beyond the rural community and we need to continue our outreach to this community. One way that has worked well is to invite foundations and government to an organic farm tour. We did this last July with great success. Most who come are from the city and are quite amazed and impressed with the complexity and integrity of organic farming. They expanded their knowledge and appreciation of the issues and barriers that organic farmers and those who are in transition face....

And finally, where some of the original members are today . . .

Herb Eldridge, now known as Thomas Eldridge, lives near Acton, where he works as a certified homeopath and as a counsellor at a business he calls *The Sensitive Person*. He still gardens organically, with the seeds for his pole-beans coming from his old farm near Ethel. Alvin Filsinger still maintains his organic orchards and on-farm store. Lawrence and Mathilde Andres and Tony and Fran McQuail are still very involved in the EFAO. Anbros Farms and the McQuails' Meeting Place Organic Farm comprised part of the 2004 Western Region Farm tours.

Ken Gascho, 80, still lives on the farm that he purchased in 1948, and says that he has some early NFA/EFAO newsletters and memorabilia packed away somewhere in his house. He remains pleased that Herb Eldridge "got the ball rolling" in an era when much of the rural Ontario community regarded organic farming with suspicion. But what makes

him happy is the fact that the farmer who recently purchased the home farm near Zurich wants to work it organically. And that, as he stated in a phone interview, is progress!

End Notes

¹Paddy Doherty of Quesnel, BC is its facilitator, under the name of the Canada Organic Initiative (COI). The CNOC's mandate follows the plan previously outlined in the *National Strategic Plan for the Canadian Organic Food & Farming Sector* which was previously published in the EFAO newsletter. For details, check CNOC website or see the Strategic Plan at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca.

Appendix 1

List of Presidents

1979 - 1983	Thomas Herb Eldridge
1983 - 1993	Lawrence Andres
1994 - 1997	Tony McQuail
1997	Hubert Earl
2000 - 2001	Fran McQuail
2002	Ken Laing
2003 - present	Ann Slater

EFAO Mission and Mandate

The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario was established in 1979:

1. To develop and provide programs promoting the practice and advancement of ecological agriculture which maintains and enhances the health of the soil, water, crops, livestock, and the diversity of the environment.
2. To educate and increase the public's understanding of ecological methods like soil tillage, green manures, cover crops, composting, crop rotations, soil erosion control, and conservation practices by offering course, seminars, conferences, farm tours, meetings, and publishing a newsletter and by collecting, researching, and disseminating information on this topic to the general public.
3. To bring together people who are concerned about ecological agriculture so they can share experiences, support each other and create community.

