



Ecological Farming in Ontario

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March - April 2016 • Volume 37 Number 2



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Ecological Farmers
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

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on the Farm**

Season Extension

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Farmer-Led Breeding

Farmers and the TPP

**Extending the
Grazing Season**

Upcoming Events

Squaring the Circle?

Education, work and farm internships

Are agricultural internships and volunteer positions strictly about addressing farms' labour needs or are they a new model of farmer education and social movement building that is taking place beyond the confines of urban centres and post-secondary institutions?

On the one hand, there is no doubt that emergent forms of non-waged labour are about work. There are many cases in which interns are working upwards of 60 hours a week on farms performing the labour that would normally be associated with a paid employee. On the other hand, farm interns often receive a tremendous amount of

hands-on experiential education in everything from organic growing methods and farm finances to marketing produce and farm lifestyles (such as homesteading and rural living). Many walk away from their internship feeling invigorated and connected to a vibrant food movement.

Can the circle, that is, education and social movement building, be squared with the reality that internships are also work, and, at times, underpaid (or even unpaid) work? This has been a key question we have been examining through conversations with interns and farmers connected to the issues.

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ABOUT THE ECOLOGICAL FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Established in 1979, the EFAO was formed by a small group of farmers around their shared commitment to sound farming practices like cover cropping, crop rotation, planting green manures, composting, soil conservation, timely and appropriate tillage, good livestock management, promoting biodiversity, and avoiding the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Our work remains rooted in the practical application of these same sustainable farming methods, which in turn remain at the centre of ecological or organic farming, and are the foundation of certified organic production standards today.

For more than 35 years, EFAO has provided essential mentorship and training for both new and established farmers. By promoting farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, learning opportunities, and creating supportive community around good food and farming, we strive to maintain and enhance the health of the soil, crops, livestock, the diversity of the environment, and our rural and urban communities.

EFAO is a registered charity with the Canada Revenue Agency. Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$25 or more. Charitable registration # 88074-6532-RR001

For new memberships and renewals, to receive our events bulletins and e-news, to register for events, post a stock exchange or display ad, use the advisory service, or just get in touch with us about anything, visit www.efao.ca, or contact:

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Editor's Message

by Fiona Campbell

I recently read an article on the website CivilEats.com called “Quitting Season: Why Farmers Walk Away From Their Farms.” It was a challenging piece to read, not because of the language or ideas presented, but because it struck a nerve: making a living by farming is hard. I’m not referring to the long hours, the physical labour, the unpredictable weather, or dealing with disease or pests, but the dollars and cents of farming.

Debbie Weingarten writes, “No one wants to think about farmers calling it quits. It muddies the heroic glow cast around our food producers. It cuts through all of the feel-good chatter about food systems and local economies. Each time a farmer quits, a little piece of our new agrarian dream dies. But however hard it is to discuss, the rate at which farmers are walking away from their farms – whether by choice or by force – may be the most important measure of whether or not our food systems are actually working. Because although farmers’ markets are springing up everywhere, the average small-scale farmer is barely surviving.”

The farmers profiled all shared a commonality (besides walking away from their farm dreams): despite trying different sales models, diversifying operations, building partnerships,

expanding into new markets, downsizing operations that no longer made financial sense, despite having support from friends and customers, despite their belief in producing food for their communities, despite falling in love with their farms and the agrarian lifestyle, despite their exhaustive efforts to do all the “right” things, their farms just weren’t making money. It’s a familiar narrative that repeats in farmyards nationwide.

While my farm operation is a tiny one, the dollars and cents of farming are still front and centre as I make plans for the upcoming season. How can I cut feed costs, be more efficient with my time and efforts to maximize my working time spent on and off-farm, what capital investments can I afford to make this year? Like many farmers, I’ve spent hours over the past slower, quieter winter months hunched over my computer, crunching numbers, reconciling revenue with expenditures. It’s an anxious and yet necessary exercise. This path is a risky one. Sometimes it feels like a lonely one, with only the bank as an ally, often a foe.

But I’m not alone. And one aspect of this life that the article didn’t touch on is the power of farm organizations to create connections, make allies of us all. The EFAO has a long history of stitching together individual farms

and farmers into a strong and resilient tapestry. Our mandate, to support a vibrant community through education, training and knowledge sharing, makes each of us stronger, more able to make good decisions to ensure the sustainability of our farms, our families and, indeed, our local food economies.

So as you sit down to your spreadsheets, your laptops, your garden plans, with an eye to making this season better than the last, know that there are others in the same place, others with the same hopes, dreams, and worries. Know that there are places to connect with these kindred spirits – at kitchen table meetings, farm tours, workshops and talks. Know that whatever challenge you’re currently facing, there are others who have been in your muckboots before.

EFAO members are generous folk, with their advice, networks, encouragement and support. So reach out when you need to, give back when you can. Be part of this beautiful and powerful synergy between growers and eaters, teachers and learners, dreamers and doers.

cheers,

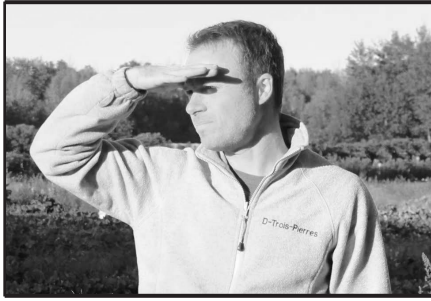
Fiona

editor@efao.ca



Happy farmers at the 2015 Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference

Board Perspective



by Denis Héraud

If I was asked to sum up the EFAO in one word, as hard as that would be, I would quickly settle on “community.” After all, it is one of the tenets of the organization, but more than that, I see it as the founding principle that created it in the first place. In a recent board meeting, I was asked how I became interested in the EFAO and eventually join its board of directors. Being asked such a question on the spot can yield some interesting answers, and as I was telling my story, I came up with something akin to the following:

“As an aspiring ecological farmer that was establishing himself in a region previously unknown to me, and on top of that farming land amongst the vast expanse of conventional corn-soy farms of Southwestern Ontario, I was feeling like an island unto myself for that first year.”

I did not have decades of farming experience under my belt to allow me to overcome common farming challenges, I did not have any like-minded farmers close-by to ask for advice, exchange ideas or to borrow some of their equipment. Though I assumed there would of course be other ecological farmers in Ontario, I did not know any of them, or how and where they congregated. Isolation is a pitfall that was far too present for me that first year. Then I was introduced to the EFAO. And a few months later I was elected to its board of directors. The island suddenly felt a whole lot smaller.

But it's still pretty big.

In these modern days, farmers are no longer bound by geography or by the time or means it takes to visit neighbouring people or communities.

They are no longer limited to once-a-year opportunities to get together with other farmers for a potluck, a conference or a kitchen table meeting. Nowhere is that more apparent than in how farmers today are reaching customers almost effortlessly through the web and social media from within the comfort of their barns. One could easily make the case that these tools have had a hand in the spreading, and the strength, of the “Eat Local” movement.

When I moved to Ontario I asked myself where I could find a community of “connected” ecological or organic farmers. Such as the one I had been a part of back when farming in Québec, the RJME (loosely translated to “The Network of Jolly Ecological Market Gardeners”), which was created in 2007 and now has about 200 people from across the province exchanging questions, expertise, ideas and information about all things dealing with ecological farming. An online community built by ecological farmers, for ecological farmers. Alas, I did not find one.

In the coming months, I will be working with the staff of EFAO to introduce such a service for Ontario's ecological farming community. Such a resource would embody the EFAO's founding principle of community, and will hopefully become an invaluable tool for new and experienced ecological farmers alike. Meeting farmers from across the province over the last few months has shown me the quality and dedication of Ontario's ecological farming community. This project aims to bring all of its members just that much closer, from London to Kingston, from Sudbury to Ottawa, from Thunder Bay to Toronto, from Timmins to Niagara Falls.

As we start putting this together, we would love to hear your thoughts on this project. You can share your ideas and vision by contacting me (info@turningleafecofarm.com) or Katie (katie@efao.ca), EFAO's Membership Services Program Manager. Keep an eye on the EFAO Newsletter for any future announcements. 🐦

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elected December 4, 2015

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If you're interested in starting a new committee, contact the EFAO office with your ideas!

“Pass the Feather” Recycling Program

Farmers asked to donate feathers for First Nations students’ art and culture program

by Dawn Setford, Executive Director

The Aboriginal Arts Collective of Canada is a registered not-for-profit organization that facilitates “Pass The Feather :: Classroom Art & Knowledge Exchange Program.” This program matches on reserve First Nations students with peers in the Ontario public school system. While the students learn about First Nations culture and art, each classroom also learns about Sharing Circles.

A Sharing Circle is an opportunity to build a sense of security and community and supports honest dialog between educators and students. In a sharing circle, the person that is holding the “talking piece” has a chance to share their views uninterrupted. A talking piece is usually a large decorated feather but can be most anything that is natural and beautiful and can be easily passed from person to person. Each of

Feathers 4 Kids!

FEATHER RECYCLING PROGRAM

Promoting the use of the entire bird! Duck, Goose, Turkey, Ostrich, Peacock, etc...
All feathers donated will go towards our Classroom Art & Knowledge Exchange!

our participating classrooms receives a decorated feather.

Beyond our classroom work, we have been invited to do an art activity at the Summer Solstice | Aboriginal Day Festival in Ottawa (<http://www.ottawasummersolstice.ca>). This gathering boasts over 6,000 students on Education Days which means we are going to need a lot of feathers!

The Feathers For Kids recycling program is an opportunity for farmers to use every bit of their harvest. We

will accept any and all feathers (duck, goose, turkey, pheasant, ostrich, etc.) Large feathers will be used for sharing circle feathers (such as goose and turkey tails and wings) and all smaller feathers will be used in art projects and workshops.

If your farm has feathers that you would be willing to donate to our ‘Feathers For Kids’ project, please email me at dawn@passthefeather.org. We are happy to come and pick up your donation whenever you’re ready.

Pest Management Exam:

What kinds of farms use Sluggo® and Opal™?

- a. Conventional
- b. Organic
- c. Small farms
- d. All of the above

Large or small scale, conventional or organic agriculture, choose the best answer for soft-bodied insects, slugs and snails

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SLUGGO
SLUG AND SNAIL BAIT



Mindfulness On the Farm

How practicing observation and mindfulness impacts our farms and our lives

by Nathan Carey

Mindfulness and meditation have changed my life for the better. I have been studying and practicing mindfulness and meditation for just over a year and in that short time I have developed a faith in the power of cultivating awareness by observing my own distorted, wild and reactive mind.

I spend a portion of each day dedicated to sitting in a quiet place and observing my breath. For the rest of the day, as much as possible, I actively observe what is happening both inside and outside of me. This active observation in the midst of life is commonly known as mindfulness.

I have been absolutely blown away by how such a simple and practical practice can have such a profound effect on the way I live out my day-to-day life.

As ecological farmers one of our most powerful tools is observation. My wife and I teach anyone who's working on our farm just how important observation is. It can mean the difference between catching a problem while it is small and manageable or missing it and, in our ignorance, allowing the problem to grow into a crisis. It could be detecting a few bugs before they become an outbreak or noticing that an animal is limping before you find her unable to get up at all.

These situations also translate to what happens inside of me—and I suspect you too: my feelings, thoughts and sensations. With mindfulness I can observe a feeling of irritation. By observing it I can catch it before it grows into a biting comment directed at someone I love, which will likely feed further anger and irritation both in myself and them. By learning how to actively observe our own thoughts and feelings we avoid putting our foot in our mouth; we learn how to stop damaging our rela-

tionships. Ultimately, we learn how to become the people we wish we could be. I didn't know that someone had worked out a practical way to do that!

Mindfulness has allowed me to systematically, daily and practically cultivate the positive aspects of myself – those I want to grow – and starve those aspects that hinder me.

Mindfulness practice is very flexible, and you can do it almost any way you like; the important thing is to stick with it and be consistent for a period of time. One way I began was to make a commitment to myself that I would try and pay attention to my face and hands as I went through my day. I came to this after noticing on a sunny, breezy day that I was walking around the farm with my hands balled into fists, a scowl marring my face and a pair of eyes that could only see work and problems. So over the next week I tried to remember my commitment and to check-in with my hands and face. Some days I would only remember one time and it was as I lay down in bed at the end of the day. Other days I would remember one, two or even four times.

I kept at it and over the weeks I was checking in more often. When I did check-in I would relax. My hands softened, I was able to enjoy the beauty around me and my face became more ready to smile. Those problems that I had identified on the farm previously were still there, but they didn't weigh on me. With this relaxed attitude they were simply problems and not burdens. This exercise led me to see how much I was causing my own misery and, consequently, how much power I had to do something about it. I glimpsed that happiness isn't an accident; it is a skill.

Mindfulness is difficult to develop. It's hard to remember to do it at all in the beginning! It's easy to get distracted or lazy about what's in front of you when you're already rushing to the next task on your list. It's very easy to travel down the well worn paths we've created in our own minds. Sometimes it's hardest to see what's right in front of us. We have all been part of a situation where someone cannot find a tool and a second person is called in to help and immediately finds it exactly where the first person was looking. The first person isn't blind (and is not necessarily a male either) but they are being momentarily blinded by their idea of where the tool should be, or blinded by frustration or blinded by distraction or a myriad other mental distortions.

Mindful observation is difficult because we're often not looking through clear lenses; all of our judgments, expectations, fears, hopes and desires cloud our ability to see clearly. The harder you hold onto those preconceived notions, the more distorted things will get. Not seeing clearly leads us to make poor decisions. They are poor not because we are stupid, but because our understanding of a situation is flawed. To do right by our soils, animals, plants and ourselves we must strive to view the marvelous mess of nature – including our own nature – with as clear and as unburdened a view as possible. It's not just spiritual – it's also incredibly practical!

If you are interested in looking into Mindfulness practice I would suggest just starting. Commit to being aware of a specific aspect of your physical sensations (my example was hands and face, shoulders might be another good one) and try to remember your commitment. Stick with it for a few weeks and see what happens. If you are piqued, look into a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course offered in your area. Make sure the person teaching it is qualified to be doing so – they will have had to be trained to offer it under that name. I would also recommend two books: *Breath by Breath* by Larry Rosenberg and *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Bhante Gunaratana. You should be aware that Mindfulness comes out of Buddhist tradition, but is not inherently Buddhist. The only criteria for it to work is that you have a human mind and that you do it! 🐾

Farmer-Led Breeding & Regionally Adapted Varieties

Notes from the Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference: Dec. 4, 2015

by Skye Vandenberg

Michael Mazourek and farming couple Petra Page-Mann and Matthew Goldfarb improve and develop regionally-adapted vegetables for market gardens in New York State. The co-presenters came to their work in different ways; Michael through his academic plant breeding research, and Petra and Matthew through their on-the-ground farming network.

Not only do crops need to adapt to climates, but they can also be adapted to grow well in specific cropping systems (for example, cover crop systems vs. fertilizer systems).

Michael illustrated this using a case study from a farmer that he collaborates with in his breeding studies: a cucumber variety, often favoured by northern producers for its elongated pedicle (making it easier to harvest with one hand and making it possible to harvest two at a time), when grown in a high tunnel in cooler climates starts to experience diseases only seen in hot southern climates. But if bred correctly, this cucumber could be adapted to the growing conditions of this particular farmer, balancing the desirable qualities.

Michael not only collaborates with farmers for his studies, but he has also employed a breeding model engaging many farmers nationwide. This model works as follows: a sweet pepper breeding study produces a cross and the fruit or seed is sent through the mail to farmers across the country. Farmers are asked to grow plants from the seeds they receive. They then choose the best of those plants and send the seed back in the mail. The peppers are then crossed again and sent out again until the new breed is developed.

Petra and Matthew approach plant

breeding from a community needs standpoint, always focusing on sourcing work from the community. The couple collaborates with seven to eight farms at a time, keeping in mind who else they can get involved in their breeding work. The relationships they build are farmer-led, meaning they wait until they hear of a need in their community, such as disease or production problems.

Farmer-led relationships come naturally to this couple and they presented a great example of their work in the community. A friend of theirs, a local farmer, was recently having problems with the reduced appearance of a characteristic tear-shaped head in a yearly crop of a Calivos variety of cabbage. The percentage of the appearance of the desired shape had been decreasing each year of seed saving. Petra and Matthew were asked to help the farmer reverse this effect through breeding.

They came to the farm and selected a number of cabbages that displayed the best shape at harvest time. Outer leaves were cut back and tasted at this point and the roots were dug up. The cabbages were then buried up to the head in fine deciduous mulch and overwintered in cool storage. The cabbages are then replanted in the spring and grown through the flowering and seeding stage. This process selects the cabbages for shape, storage ability, and flavour. The hope is that the crop from the following year will present a higher frequency of the desired trait.

Petra and Matthew employ two different models in their local breeding venture. In one model, they work with a farmer to rogue and select plants. They then grow the crop out on the farm, package these seeds to sell for their own business and give the farmer back seeds perpetually.

They have also used a model where they purchase a crop from a farmer for the seed and the farmer agrees to purchase the seed back from them, while also adding the stock to their regular seed business.

Types of crop breeding

Michael also explained the three common types of crop breeding:

Mass Selection

- Most basic, breeding of open-pollinated varieties
- You are always selecting for multiple traits (minimum of three)
- This is the style that Petra and Matthew, as well as most market gardeners, employ

Beginning with many possible alleles in the population you simply save the best seeds each season. For example, a kale farmer is able to select for colour, leaf frill and late season vigour. Spring is when you select for colour and leaf shape by rouging (identifying plants with undesirable characteristics) your seedling patch. Overwintering the kale selects for late season vigour. The best plants from the crop are allowed to flower, go to seed and dry in the field before harvesting.

Pedigree Selection

- Creates new combinations of traits from existing varieties
- You are working on very few alleles
- Works on self-pollinating plants

The pedigree method starts by making a cross of two plants with desired traits to create an F2 population. At this point you want to sow 50 to 50,000 plants from that cross. From the F2 generation you will select the individuals that display the desired trait and self-pollinate, by hand, creating the F3 generation. From the F3 generation you will select the best individuals and self-pollinate, by hand, creating the F4 generation. Repeating this step until you hit the F5 generation at which point you would increase the population size to evaluate the crop on a population scale. As you reach the F8 generation and higher you end up with a stable line or "pure line" and it can be considered an open-pollinated plant and should breed true.

continued pg. 12

The Organic Permitted Substances List

Understanding Annex A and the requirements for organic production

by Hugh Martin

The revised 2015 organic standards were published in November 2015 and are now available. There are, as before, two documents: 32-310, giving the Principles and Management requirements for organic production, and 32-311, referred to as the Permitted Substances List or “PSL.”

In the new version there have been many clarifications and a few additions, so I recommend this be required reading for this spring to refresh your memory on the requirements for organic production (whether you are certified or not). To find a copy go to <http://organicfederation.ca/organic-agricultural-standards> or contact your certification body.

One new addition to the 2015 PSL, is Annex A which is an alphabetized list of all substances included in the PSL. This names each substance, the annotation (or origin and usage comments), and which PSL table is it referenced in.

For many people it is confusing that this is a list of substances and not a product list. When you go to buy a product to include in your organic production system you need to know if it is permitted for organic. The PSL will give you guidance to know what is allowed, but most products have more than one ingredient and all ingredients must be permitted substances and on the PSL. In general, if it is not on the PSL it is not allowed unless the substance itself is certified organic.

Some PSL examples:

- Compost has a lot of detail on which types of compost are permitted and which materials are allowed to be composted.
- There are several fertilizer and soil amendment substances listed and many have annotations as to conditions when they can be used. You may have to have a documented need for the product (such as a soil or crop deficiency). Products may need to be naturally mined and added adjuvants to improve flowability and reduce dust may not be

allowed unless they are on the PSL.

- Similarly crop or pest management products will need to have both the active ingredient and other formulators included in the PSL. These formulations also change periodically. Last year there was a case where a common product (soybean inoculant) had been used for several years on organic farms, but the product had been reformulated in late 2014 and in 2015 the new formulation was no longer compliant with organic standards. This highlights the need to have all substances identified to the certifying body (CB) annually with your application so that you do not get surprises later.

- The PSL also includes a number of substances for livestock feed ingredients and health care products. If you are processing food products there are lists of ingredients that might be used for various organic products. For some substances there are requirements on whether they need to be organic or can be synthetic if not available as organic. Cleaners, disinfectants and pest control substances for facilities are also included.

If you want a list of products to help you in your research for inputs, here are some suggestions:

- Check with your CB. Some may have lists of approved products they can share with you. I know that Procert has one on their website.

- Organicinputs.ca is an interesting site to look at and guides you to the product you may be interested in, but these are not all approved for use in organic. You still need to have these reviewed by the CB.

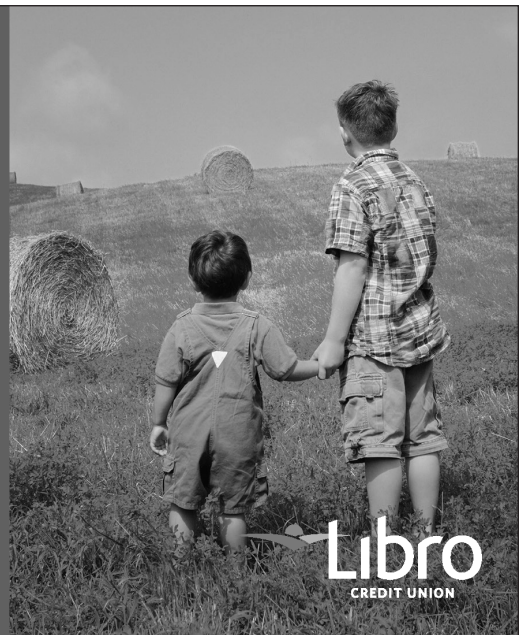
- OMRI.org (Organic Materials Review Institute) has a long history of reviewing products to the USDA NOP standards and are famous for their lists, but some products on their USA list may not be appropriate in Canada. As a result, they started reviewing products to the Canadian standards a couple years ago and are gradually building their Canadian list (<http://www.omri.org/omri-lists>), but again these need to be identified to your CB in your organic systems plan.

Bottom line: Plan now what you intend to use this year and get approvals from your CB for all products and substances that you may be using. It is better to get approval now and not use it, than to be in a rush in mid-season to get approval. Never use a product without CB approval -- its is not worth the risk! 🐾

We understand farming because we grew up farming too.

Farmers know well that today's hard work is tomorrow's healthy yield. With our deep roots in agriculture, we understand the needs of the diverse farming operations across southwestern Ontario. We've been here in the good times and in bad, and ready to take on the challenges, to inspire financial happiness and build prosperity for our farming community.

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Squaring the Circle?

Education, work and farm internships (cont. from pg 1)

by Michael Ekers and Charles Levkoe

In our first article (Sept-Oct 2015 issue), we noted the relatively meager gross revenues of many farms that work with interns and volunteers in Ontario, but this is a trend that stretches across Canada and beyond. A cheap food policy, ever escalating land costs and labour intensive forms of farming make alternative food production a difficult economic proposition. As readers will know, a tremendous amount of work goes into planning, planting, weeding and harvesting organic food production and several people we spoke with suggested that interns and volunteers have become a replacement for the work that chemicals typically perform on conventional farms.

A farmer, who also works for a non-profit organization linking potential interns and farm hosts, suggested that internships are primarily about labour: "One thing that is common to all of the farms [using interns], if they are being honest, whatever they're motivations are, they're solving a labour challenge on their farms." From this perspective, financially precarious farm businesses are meeting their intensive on-farm labour demands through the non-waged work of interns and volunteers.

While the question of labour clearly matters in the arrangements established between farmers and interns, the issue cannot be reduced to such a simply economic rationale. The benefits of an internship far exceed monetary considerations and this is what contributes to the vibrancy of the experience for many the workers and hosts, but not all. One farmer explained, "The intern system is a really good one, and I think one that has value for both the farmer and the intern. Does the accommodation, good healthy food from the soil and the learning experience not have value too? What price can be put on fostering friendships and community? Intern and apprentice programs go far beyond what the intern provides to the farm." Similarly, another farmer lauded the same benefits while stressing that "a paid position would be

less likely to be a vehicle for change." There is no doubt that internships defined by mutuality and reciprocity are a form of movement building and provide a valuable form of education, but does paying a wage necessarily detract from these facets of farm internships?

In many cases, our observations and our discussions with interns and farmers suggested that the most substantive internships were the ones that most closely paralleled what would be traditionally associated with work. When an internship looked like work, and felt like work for the interns, but was coupled with careful instruction, many non-waged farm workers reported receiving a robust education. When the internships were less structured and when the work was not overly demanding, such arrangements appeared to be more of an 'experience' rather than a nuanced and embodied form of education and work. This creates several interesting contradictions that are worth reflecting on.

Several farmers suggested that the relationship between education and work is a zero sum game in which dedicating more time to education means less work is accomplished. This, in turn, justifies the lack of pay because the benefits are non-monetary in character. However, this is not necessarily the case if the internships that closely parallel farm work are the ones delivering a substantive and quality education to the interns. But this scenario also raises a thorny issue as farm owners and operators are open to the critique that 'if it looks like work it should be paid like work'. Nevertheless, some farmers have responded, "we don't even pay ourselves, how can we pay our interns?" In contrast, others explained that "internships are inter-generationally unjust" and "that everyone should make a living wage."

Interestingly, many farmers stated their farm operations became more viable at a financial and functional level when they started to pay their interns and/or made the decision to hire paid workers. Furthermore, they told us that

expectations were clearer between interns and farm operators, workers were more productive and the farmers reported spending far less time re-training each new group of interns and volunteers while also mediating on-farm social dynamics.

These reflections leave several lingering questions. First, were the farms that transitioned away from interns able to achieve this because of their earlier reliance on non-waged workers? Second, have organic and agroecological farms that have moved towards paid workers been able to maintain their 'alternative' character, that is, community orientations and the commitment to social movement building?

In our next installment we will explore some of the issues discussed above from the perspective of interns and volunteers. 🍀



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Fresh Forest-Grown Mushrooms

Diversify your farm operations with Shiitakes

by Karen Maitland

In the last issue (Jan-Feb 2016) I wrote about how adding cut flowers to your farm or market garden can be a good way to diversify operations. To continue with this “ideas to diversify your farm” theme, this issue I’m sharing notes from the “Fresh Forest-Grown Shiitake Mushrooms” workshop at the 2015 Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference last December.

Ahren Hughes of Blackshire Gardens in Neustadt currently has 1,000 logs in various stages of Shiitake mushroom production. He likes shiitakes because they are reliable, and less susceptible to invasive native fungi. With proper handling they also have a long shelf life, making them easier to market.

Ahren’s mushroom season begins in March with the arrival of fresh winter-cut sugar maple logs, chosen because the sugar maple is the hardest wood in the area that is readily available and cost effective. Also, bark loss and the probability of native fungi contamination is kept to a minimum when a tree is cut in the winter before sap flows. Trees that are dead at harvest are not used. Ahren works with the log providers to limit the log diameter of the load to between 4 and 7 inches. Anything larger is too heavy to handle.

After cutting the logs into four foot lengths, Ahren begins the process of inoculation. He drills holes in rows down the length of the log, each with approximately 6 inch centres and at 1-1/4 inch depth. One row of holes is drilled per inch of log diameter. Each hole is packed fully with a spawn sawdust mix. (Ahren purchases the spawn and adds sawdust.) The holes are then sealed with beeswax, as are any other open (barkless) spots including the log ends. Ideally, logs should be ready for the fruiting yard by the end of April. Until they are moved they are protected from both heavy frost and direct sun.

Ahren’s fruiting yard is a hardwood bush on a slight hill. It is a productive site because it provides good air flow

(but not windy), dappled sunlight and good drainage -- conditions that are optimal for mushroom growing. New logs are leaned onto a supporting A-frame structure, tagged with the year and variety, topped with a spray irrigation line and left to colonize for a summer. Logs may be irrigated if moisture levels drop below 35 percent, as Shiitake mycelium start dying at 22% moisture and lower. White log ends are a good indication of strong log colonization.

Mushroom production begins in the second year with the first shocking of the log. Ahren shocks his logs by soaking them in water for up to 24 hours. Mushrooms start to appear three days later and harvesting begins in about a week. Logs are soaked a second time in the season but need at least 60 days in between. During fruiting, logs are misted up to three times per day. Each log averages 1.5 lbs of mushrooms per fruiting session. With Ahren’s forced fruiting regime a 4 inch log will typically have two or three years of viable production.

Mushrooms are best harvested when the margins are curling and just starting to show the gills. These mushrooms have a shelf life of about three weeks, if they are refrigerated right after harvest. Mushroom size is determined at emergence. To catch mushrooms at their best, Ahren could be harvesting twice a day in the warmer part of the summer. On average, each log is examined three times per fruiting session. Any product that is not sold fresh is dried.

More in-depth details from Ahren’s conference session, including cost accounting, can be found on the EFAO website conference proceedings. 🐾

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Farmer-Led Breeding & Regionally Adapted Varieties

continued from pg. 8

Backcross Selection

- Technique used for the breeding of individual traits
- You can keep every aspect of the elite plant line but tweak (or introgress) one trait by crossing the elite plant with a plant with a special adaptation
- You can use this type of selection with the genetic trait of resistance to mildew
- The special trait must be carried on a dominant allele

In this method an elite line vegetable variety (i.e. a line popular for characteristics like production, flavour or size) is hybridized with a variety exhibiting a desirable trait like mildew resistance that the elite line does not currently have.

After the first cross, the F1 progeny is selected for the special adaptation and backcrossed with the parent from the elite line. After four generations you should have a breed where 96% of the progeny have all the traits of the elite parent and the special adaptation.

Population size

Population size is important in breeding studies to ensure you will be guaranteed to have the gene expressed in the next generation. (Each offspring will not express the charac-

teristics you would like to see in each generation.) You can calculate the population size needed for a breeding experiment using this formula:

$$\ln(1-P) / \ln(1-f) = \text{Number of plants}$$

- Where \ln is the natural logarithm
- P is the probability that a plant in the study will exhibit the gene or characteristic you would like
- f is the probability at which the gene appears in the population. The probability of occurrence for a homozygous plant is 0.25 when the cross is made between two homozygous plants.

The formula then becomes:

$$\ln(1-0.99) / \ln(1-0.25) = 16$$

This formula tells us that we need a minimum of 16 plants for a breeding project grown at each stage to ensure our desired trait will be present in the next generation. That number does not take into account the losses due to poor storage or weather, so breeding more than 16 would be advisable.

You can Google "crop name, gene list" to get all the possible genes available from one specific plant, ie. with mildew resistance not every type of plant will have this gene. 🍷

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The Trans Pacific Partnership

Assessing the net benefit for Canadian farmers

by Ann Slater

Canadian Minister of Trade, Chrystia Freeland, along with representatives from twelve other countries, including the United States, Japan, Chile, Brunei, Vietnam and New Zealand, signed the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) on February 4, 2016.

This signing ceremony is apparently the next step in the process, following the finalization of TPP negotiations on October 4, 2015. Like the other eleven countries signing the agreement, Canada now has two years to ratify the agreement.

Both the text of the agreement and side agreement letters between Canada and individual TPP countries were made public on November 5, 2015 and can be viewed on the Global Affairs Canada website.

Agriculture tends to be a contentious issue during trade negotiations, as some countries strive to support their farmers and local food economies while others seek opportunities to export agricultural commodities. Similarly, farmers in Canada and farm organizations rarely agree on whether or not any particular trade agreement will have a net benefit for Canadian farmers. The TPP is no different.

Positions by the CFA and NFU

One Canadian general farm organization, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), fully supports Canada's participation in the TPP, in part because it believes the deal provides a huge potential opportunity to export Canadian pork and beef to Japan. The CFA says that 51 percent of Canada's agri-food exports currently go to TPP countries and those markets could be at risk if Canada does not participate.

On the other hand, the National Farmers Union (NFU), says that the fundamental purpose of trade deals like the TPP is to build an international framework that takes decision-making power away from national governments and gives it to multi-national corpora-

“Agriculture tends to be a contentious issue during trade negotiations, as some countries strive to support their farmers and local food economies while others seek opportunities to export agricultural commodities. Similarly, farmers in Canada and farm organizations rarely agree on whether or not any particular trade agreement will have a net benefit for Canadian farmers. The TPP is no different.”

tions. The NFU promotes food sovereignty, which it defines as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. According to the NFU, participation in the TPP would move Canada in the opposite direction of food sovereignty.

The TPP and Supply Management

Most countries around the world focus their dairy policies on providing milk for their own populations. This is the case in Canada, where one of the pillars of our supply management system is import controls. However, three countries involved in the TPP have made milk exports a key part of their dairy policy and want the TPP to open up additional export markets for their milk, including exports to Canada. New Zealand exports about 95 percent of its dairy production; Australia exports almost half of the milk it produces and 15 percent of American dairy production is destined for the export market. Upon final ratification of the TPP, Canada would immediately allow imports equal to 3.25 percent of Canada's current fresh milk supply, imports that will likely come from the U.S.

The TPP and rBGH

In the 1990's Canada banned the use of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH) because our regulatory bodies decided that this genetically engineered hormone increased disease and suffering in cows. American regulators made a different decision and continue to allow the use of rBGH as a tool to help increase milk production. There is no requirement to separate or label milk produced with rBGH.

Of course, organic farmers in the U.S. are not able to use rBGH and ecologically-minded farmers will not use it. The NFU has suggested that if the TPP is ratified by Canada, we can expect to have milk produced with rBGH brought into Canada.

For more information and analysis

Both the CFA and the NFU have additional analysis of the TPP on their websites – in the 'Hot Topics' tab on the CFA website and highlighted on the NFU's home page. Although, she signed the agreement on our behalf on February 4, Minister Freeland also stated that the decision on whether or not Canada will participate in TPP will be made later. However, with the finalization of negotiations last October, the agreement cannot be changed. The choice for all countries involved is to ratify or stay out of the TPP. 🐾

Comments on the TPP can be sent to the federal government at TPP-PTP.consultations@international.gc.ca.

Regional Report

Strategies for Extending the Grazing Season Guelph, Ont.

January 29, 2016

by Barbara Naylor

As part of the Winter Workshop Series (held in the days before the Guelph Organic Conference), the EFAO organized a very interesting lecture on grazing for a small, enthusiastic group of farmers.

With PowerPoint presentations describing three very different approaches to pasture management, attendees were privy to some very innovative ideas. All who attended were farmers of varying degrees with a common interest in pasture management for a wide variety of livestock.

The session was started and led by Tony McQuail of Meeting Place Organic Farm in Lucknow, near Lake Huron. Tony and his wife Fran have been on their farm for 40 years. Tony began by saying that there are no experts and that we are learning from each other by sharing information, adding that this is what the EFAO is all about. This set the tone for the afternoon.

Tony gave an excellent overview of pasture management, and the difference between planned grazing and set stocking. While planned grazing is strategic, set stocking is when animals are put on 100 acres surrounded by a fence. Tony explained how, with proper pasture management, the animal impact on wet soil could be minimized, how in the "summer slump" if the soil is given adequate recovery it encourages deep rooting, and how the cool season grasses slow down and how the soil is shaded, reducing soil temperatures.

He discussed the advantages and possibilities of growing crops for grazing. For example, cover crops can be grazed, winter rye helps with early spring grazing, corn can be harvested by pasturing it, and summer annuals (sorghum, sodan grass) as well as fall crops (turnip, kale, oats and peas) are a good crops to consider. Tony also talked about how he uses work horses to plant a cocktail mix (field corn, spring wheat,



Happy cows grazing at Meeting Place Organic Farm

among other seeds), and how the manure, when the animals clean it off, helps the soil.

These were some of the interesting points of his lecture, and he finished by saying "you are the experts on your farm." He encouraged us to experiment to discover what will work, and to think about what you want to accomplish and to try different season extension strategies.

The next speaker was Bill Van Ness who owns and operates St. Brigid's Dairy with his family in Brussels. He has between 300 and 400 milking cows, depending on the time of year. He explained his holistic approach of rotational grazing, describing it as "mob grazing" where his cattle are moved four times minimum per day and up to eight to 10 times per day, which helps the pasture to be grazed evenly.

The cover crops he mentioned were sunflower, sorghum, radish and peas, noting that there are lots of suppliers for the seed combinations. Some of the seeds he uses in combinations are fava beans (which have 25% more protein than soya beans and double the yield), turnip, and rye grass, and mentioned buckwheat together with radish and crimson clover. He has also planted pollinator mixes and inter-seeded with corn, crimson clover and annual ryegrass. This is a fraction of the lists he had of what he uses.

He told of a common saying that "one day in August is like a week in September, is like a month in October." Translation: in August, growth is best.

He also explained how he uses Silva grazing, which is grazing between the trees, and how it especially helps in the summer slump. His goal is to grow grass between the trees. He also explained K-Line Irrigation from New Zealand, which he plans to incorporate more into his farm. He finished with the tools he uses and the different ways of using the tools to grow more grass. He explained his system of using electric fence to be able to move his animals as often as he does. He mentioned that with electric fence, you have to train the animals to it.

He highly recommended the book 'Fertility Pastures', by Newman Turner for ideas on pasture management.

continued on next page

Regional Report

The final speaker was Darrell Roes, who has started a company called Sprouting Inc. His marketing motto is "Fresh grass for year-round grazing." His operation is just outside of Baden, where he grows hydroponic barley grass, enabling him to raise his animals on fresh grass 365 days per year.

It is a completely different approach and again impressive. He does supplement his animals with hay for fibre, but he explained the use of barley grass as year-round grazing. The barley grass grows from seed to feed in 4-7 days. He explained how the digestibility is improved, that the sprouts are 18 percent protein, 80-90 percent moisture, which also helps with hydration. He feeds the entire plant, the root as well.

He explained the benefits of animal health and nutrition, and the environmental and economic benefits, which are many: from improved weight, fat and marbling, coat condition and fertility in beef cattle to improved milk production and compounds of the milk as well in dairy cows. For pig health there is faster weight gain, lower feed cost,



reduced back fat and increased marbling. For chickens he uses different grains as well, but the sprouts can be two-thirds of their diet.

Economically, feed costs are 15 percent cheaper than with grass, and that after nursing for three months, you will have a 200 pound carcass at eight months. Environmentally, there is less water usage and less methane gas. Darrell mentioned afterwards that this is a big business and a well-used feeding approach in Europe where farm sizes are generally smaller.

He went into more details of his operation, that with new equipment he now produces 10,000 lbs per day. That is with two people working four hours per day. He also described the challenges he has had to deal with to get to this point of production, but he is now ready to expand and continue growing his business. More can be found at his website: sproutinginc.com

This is a brief summary of the wisdom shared by these three farmers. They were inspiring to say the least and I think we all left with many new ideas and new motivation. 🐾



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EFAO Events Listing

MARCH

Mar 12: Flower Growing Plans for 2016 KTM

1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Garden Party 1528 Notre Dame Dr., St. Agatha

Join other cut-flower growers and flower fanatics for a chat about your plans for the coming year. We want to hear about your favourite flowers to grow, new things you're excited to try out, things you will never grow again, and your best tips and tricks for growing abundant blooms all season long. We'd like to establish a network of sustainable flower growers in Ontario, to share useful information for flower farmers in our area. We will have coffee/tea and some refreshments; feel free to bring treats but they are not required. Definitely bring your passion for flowers!

Cost: Free for members; Non-members \$10

Mar 15: Keeping a Balance KTM

10:30 am - 2:00 pm

Meeting Place Organic Farm, 86016 Creek Line, Lucknow

Share tips and discuss strategies around being a farmer and having a life (eg other interests) too. Bring a potluck contribution for lunch. Come meet new second generation farmer, Katrina McQuail.

Cost: Free for members; Non-members \$10

Mar 20: Vegetable Varietal Performance Evaluation Exchange

10:00 am - 3:00 pm

312069 Hwy 6 RR3, Ayton

There are a lot of vegetable varieties out there and they all perform differently. This meeting will serve to sort through the desirable and undesirable qualities that we're seeing in our variety trials and help one another guide our long-standing variety choices and inspire experiments. Participants will collaboratively determine the top 5 and 10 vegetables to discuss prior to the meeting via an online survey, so register in advance! Come prepared with:

- Your core variety choices & experimental variety choices
- Some observations on germination, yield, earliness of harvest, aesthetics, flavour, handling durability & shelf life, variety-specific disease & physiological disorders, marketability and adaptability to efficient cultural methods.
- A potluck dish for lunch

Cost: Free for members; Non-members \$10

Mar 22: Incorporating Permaculture Into Your Farm Design

10:30 am - 2:00 pm

Manorun Organic Farm, 782 Hwy 52, Hamilton

Chris Krucker from Manorun Organic Farm and Shawn McCarty from Chickabee Garden Farm will lead a tour and discussion on incorporating permaculture practices into your existing farm designs. Manorun Organic Farm planted an Oak Savannah in a 20 ac field; come and tour and find out how this permaculture design can help organic farmers build soil fertility, increase carbon in soil, even out dry and wet areas in fields, fight bugs and weeds. Potluck lunch.

Cost: Free for members; Non-members \$10

Mar 26: Fruit Tree Pruning KTM

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

4565 Watson Rd S, Puslinch

Join Gerry Stephenson from Drumlin Farm and other fruit tree enthusiasts to discuss and practise spring-time orchard maintenance. Don't forget to bring your secateurs for pruning! Bring a potluck item for lunch.

Cost: Free for members; Non-members \$10

APRIL

Apr 2: Film Screening: Meeting Place Organic Film

2:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Huron County Museum, 110 North Street, Goderich

A documentary film about how one couple built a sustainable, organic and ecologically diverse farm in a world bent on industrial agriculture and mono cropping. This will be the film's first screening event!

Stay afterwards to enjoy an organic cider tasting. Revel Cider will be launching Ontario's first organic hard cider this spring, made with apples from Meeting Place Organic Farm.

Cost: Free!

Apr 10: New and Young Farmers' KTM

1:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Location: Zócalo Organics, 5881 3rd Line, Erin

Come connect with other new and aspiring farmers to talk about the ideas and issues that are most important and inspiring to the new generation of organic growers. Suggestions for discussion topics are welcome. The event also includes a potluck—please include an ingredients list with your dish.

Cost: Free for members; non-members \$10

Notes From The Office

by Sarah Hargreaves

Over 25 farmers attended the Farmer-led Research Program Information Session at the Guelph Organic Conference on January 31st to share what makes them curious on their farms and ideas for research trials in 2016. It was exciting to see and hear from such a curious and outspoken group!

The session started with the “What, why, when and how?” of farmer-led on-farm research, including some inspirational quotes from long-time farmer-researchers south of the border— “[On-farm research] is a flexible and affordable tool to get the reliable answers” and “It gives you ownership of research and results”—as well as clips from *The Masters of On-Farm Research* by Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Arguably, however, the most exciting part of the morning was the brainstorming session.

Participants divided by sector – Horticulture and Livestock/Field Crops. Farmers in the two groups shared and discussed research

questions and ranked topics as a way to set research priorities for 2016, paying close attention to the fact that trial design and data collection are on a tight timeline this year due the timing of our funding.

The Horticulture group ranked cover crops, intercropping and soil amendments as top research topics, while the Livestock/Field Crops group worked on discussing and designing a multi-farm comparison of different soil health tests. You can see the full list of research questions and topics here: <https://efao.ca/the-dirt-on-farmer-led-research-program-information-session-and-next-steps/>

While the research projects are conceived and carried out by farmers on their farms, we need help selecting trials. This is the role of the Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel, comprised of EFAO farmers Thorsten Arnold, Paul DeJong, Angie Koch, Ken Laing, Darrel Roes and University and non-profit partners Dr. Ralph Martin/U of Guelph, and Aabir Dey/The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian

Seed Security, meets this month to guide project selection and, when needed, trial design. Expect to hear more in March about the Advisory Panel’s meeting.

Given the broad interest in cover crops, we are forming a Cover Crops Working Group for vegetable or field crop production. Contact Sarah, sarah@efao.ca, to be added to the group or for more information.

Find more information about the Farmer-led Research Program on our webpage! (<https://efao.ca/farmer-led-research/>) 🐾

Two new EFAO Member Committees!

Join the **EFAO Young Farmers Advisory Committee** to inspire future young farmer-focused workshops, tours, and networking events and to share ideas about how EFAO can better serve young farmers and help to strengthen this important part of Ontario’s ecological agriculture community.

Or join the **EFAO East Region Committee** to plan Kitchen Table Meetings, Member-Organized Farm Tours, and other events in eastern Ontario, as well as providing valuable input on other areas of EFAO programming, including workshops and the annual Conference.

If you are interested in being a part of either of these new committees, please be in touch with Katie Baikie at katie@efao.ca.



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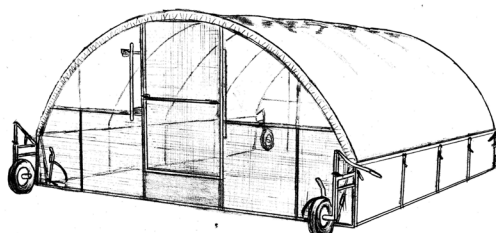
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☐ vegetables ☐ specialty items

List of Marketed Products: _____

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