



NEWS FROM CANADA

OTA Canada

On March 1, OTA's Board of Directors voted to move forward with OTA Canada as an operating division of the association. This fulfills a long-term goal of OTA to create a stronger presence in Canada. OTA has always had members on its board from Canada and even two Canadian presidents. This move comes just as Canada is preparing to issue its federal organic standards, which will require much attention from OTA.

Here is background on OTA Canada's formation and a look ahead.

In 2004, OTA hired the Association Strategy Group (ASG) to help develop an approach to strengthen OTA's presence in Canada. The OTA Canada Advisory Board was formed at the same time to review ASG proposals and make recommendations to OTA's Board of Directors.

ASG conducted a web-based poll of OTA's Canadian members and a telephone survey of Canadians active in organic trade but not OTA members to define how best to organize OTA's presence in the Canadian market. Those surveyed shared their strong level of support for OTA's current programming, but expressed a desire for strengthening programming in Canada.

The following priorities for enhanced involvement of OTA in Canada were identified:

- Advocate for and monitor public policy and standards related to the organic sector
- Educate the public about the organic sector
- Promote organic sector businesses
- Provide networking opportunities and events for members
- Engage in public relations and marketing activities regarding the organic sector
- Provide members with information, news, and communications to help

them succeed, and

- Establish links with research-based organizations mandated to conduct research in the organic field.

ASG's final recommendation, adopted by the OTA Canada Advisory Board and then by OTA's Board of Directors, was to modify the existing OTA structure to better focus efforts on Canadian programming. As a result, OTA Canada will be an operating division of OTA, with a managing director reporting directly to the OTA Executive Director and an elected advisory committee to set strategic priorities and goals. At least for the first two years, all dues from Canadian members, as well as Canadian pledges to the OTA Annual Fund, will be directed to OTA Canada operations and programming.

The following persons served on the OTA Canada Advisory Board that helped develop these first steps: Chakib Azizi (Bianca International Organic Ingredients), Hélène Bouvier (Minnewashta Valley Organics), Debra Boyle (SunOpta/ProOrganics), Nancy Ciancibello (PlenOrganics), Dag Falck (Nature's Path Foods), Jason Freeman (FarmerDirect Cooperative), Jennifer Grant (Harmony Whole Foods), David Konrad (David Konrad Consulting), Kurstin Leith (Capers Markets), Jennifer Scott (Centre for Systems Integration), Joe Smillie (Quality Assurance International), and Kelly Monaghan (Ash Street Enterprises), who coordinated the OTA Canada proposal with Laura Stravino (OTA's Director of Membership and Special Events).

The election for the first OTA Canada Advisory Committee will take place this month. After the election, OTA, in consultation with the committee, will develop a job description for the OTA Canada

Managing Director and begin strategic planning for the division. For more information about OTA Canada development, contact lstravino@ota.com.

OTA has developed a solid program in Canada and offers valuable benefits to members. More members are needed to keep the momentum building! Please get involved in OTA Canada—and bring OTA Canada new members. Tell your colleagues about OTA and direct them to the OTA web site or to e-mail otacanada@ota.com.

On the verge of organic regulations

As of press time, Canada's organic sector was still awaiting publication of federal standards and regulation. The Canadian Organic Standard is expected this summer, once the revisions have been approved and translated. The regulation is also expected to be pre-published in the *Canada Gazette* for comment during the summer.

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) Organic Production System Task Force (OTF), following pre-publication there will be a 75-day comment period, followed by 60 days for comments to be studied and addressed prior to final publication. The regulation itself is to be a concise document of approximately ten pages. The daily management and procedural details will be spelled out in the Quality Management System Manual, including the roles and responsibilities of both the Canada Organic Office and an organic sector council that will advise on the federal regulation and standard.

On May 19, the office of Chuck Strahl, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, wrote to OTA:

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“The Government of Canada remains committed to implementing a national organic regulatory regime, with the objectives of protecting consumers and supporting market access for organic products. Although there has been some delay, the Minister is hopeful that the regulations will be pre-published by early summer.

“As noted during the 2004-05 consultations with the organic sector and provincial and territorial governments, the Organic Production System Task Force is obliged to respect established regulatory development steps and procedures. On average, this takes two years to complete; however, we are taking steps to accelerate the process. Progress has been made in relation to the regulatory process and in the development of implementation tools, such as the drafting of a Quality Management System Manual for the future Canada organic regime.”

The letter also stated that industry consensus will be critical to the success of this initiative.

ORGANIC SECTOR'S ROLE

At the Guelph Organic Conference in late January, the Organic Regulatory Committee (ORC) offered a proposal describing the composition and mandate of the sector council. The proposal called for the council to include one industry representative from each province, with a mandate limited to advising on Canada's federal organic regulation and standard.

At the end of March, there was an unexpected snag. The Canadian Organic Advisory Board (COAB), which owned the trademark “Canada Organic—Biologique Canada,” initially indicated it would not release the trademark for use in Canada's organic system. COAB members later reconsidered, agreeing to allow CFIA to use it under the coming regulation. OTA

thanks COAB and the Organic Regulatory Committee for their diligence and cooperation on this matter.

In May at All Things Organic™, OTA partnered with the National Association of State Organic Programs to co-host the first North American Summit on Organic Production and Marketing. During the Canada session, a show of hands indicated about 40 Canadians present. Michel Saumur, project manager of the CFIA Organic Task Force, gave an overview of the proposed Canadian regulation. He and OTA's Canadian Council liaison Stephanie Wells covered the history of the regulatory initiative. The summit was well attended by representatives from CFIA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, International Trade Canada, the Conseil des appellations agroalimentaires du Québec (CAAQ), and from the agriculture ministries of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Prince Edward Island.

During the summit, Saumur, Mark Bradley of the U.S. National Organic Program and Roberto Vasquez, Analyses and Relations Director for the Undersecretary of Agriculture of Mexico (SAGARPA), had the opportunity to compare their programs and begin discussing how the three countries can best cooperate to facilitate organic trade in North America.

News Updates

- The final stage of Province of Quebec's Pesticide Code was to come into full effect in April. The code bans the sale and use of 20 common ingredients used in hundreds of synthetic lawn and garden products. The ban has been phased in during the past three years. For more information, go to www.cap-quebec.com.
- Saskatchewan organic producers have endorsed a plan to establish a Saskatchewan Organic Commission. Seventy-eight percent of growers who returned ballots sent out in January were in favor of creating a commission that would redirect

existing check-off dollars from a number of provincial commodity groups. A proposal for such a commission would have to be submitted to the Saskatchewan Agri-Food Council, the provincial government agency that supervises the activities of marketing and development agencies.

- Great Ocean Natural Foods in Halifax has changed its name to Planet Organic Market. Founded in 1990, Great Ocean Natural Food is an established organic and natural retailer.
- The Western Grains Research Foundation has announced an organic wheat breeding project. The three-year project is to identify suitable lines for future breeding efforts. It is a joint effort between the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Alberta. See www.westerngrains.com/news/nr_060315.html.

ORGANIC PIONEER DIES

The Canadian organic community suffered a loss with the death of Alex Scott on April 14.

In 2004, Scott and his wife Bette were the first organic farmers to be inducted into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame tribute to them stated: “A common bond ties these individuals—their selflessness. They gave of themselves so that generations to follow would benefit from their accomplishments. These pioneers have created a character for our province and country. Through them, we have reached a maturity of which we, as a diverse culture, can be proud.”

Scott and his wife were founding members of the Organic Producers Association of Manitoba (OPAM) in 1988. Organic farmers since 1978, the Scotts recognized the need for an organization that would address the needs of organic producers by certifying products, providing education and developing markets. They spent countless volunteer hours promoting organic farming to other producers. ■