

August 2013

## Questions and Answers on issues related to the Canadian Organic Standards

Can conventional straw be used as a compost feedstock for compost that is used to grow organic mushrooms?

Does the prohibition against using both the organic and non-organic form of an ingredient (8.2.5) apply to different varieties of grapes used in a wine, or different flours (e.g. barley and wheat) used to bake a single bread?

The Organic Standards Interpretation Committee (SIC) provides interpretive guidance to the Canada Organic Office on issues related to the National Standards for Organic Agriculture (CAN/CGSB 32.310 and CAN/CGSB 32.311). [Click here](#) to consult the proposed answers to the various questions (also attached), raised by organic stakeholders, regarding the National Standards for Organic Agriculture.

The proposed responses are subject to a 60 day comment period starting August 28<sup>th</sup>, ending October 28<sup>th</sup> 2013

All comments regarding these answers should be sent to [OPR.RPB@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:OPR.RPB@inspection.gc.ca)

### Archives - Final Questions and Answers

All final questions and answers are posted on [OFC website](#) (as pdf).

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### A Message of the Canada Organic Office

During the period while the standards are being reviewed, the most recent version of the standards, CGSB 32.310/32.311-2006 August 2011 will continue to be enforced by the CFIA and CFIA accredited Certification Bodies.

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## The 2013-2015 Review of the Canadian Organic Standards

### Updates

While CGSB was negotiating and finalizing the 2-year review workplan with SCC, the organic sector has not been idle. Under OFC initiative, important preparatory work has been accomplished.

- The Work Lists (WL) have been completed and prioritized. All questions submitted by the Standards Interpretation Committee (48 in total) to the Technical Committee (CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture) have been integrated in the WLs.

- The Working Groups will be back to work very soon. Seven WG conveners are actively reestablishing their working groups and preparing their agenda and meeting schedule; the mandate of the Working Groups will consist in preparing and proposing amendments to the standard, basing their work on the WL items. Current WG Conveners are: **Jean**
- **Duval** (Crop Production, Maple, Mushroom, Greenhouse, Sprout, Wild crops), **Anne Macey** (Livestock Production, Honey), **Rochelle Eisen** (Preparation, Organic Plan, Definitions and Terminology), **Janine Gibson** (PSL- Livestock Production), **Linda Edwards** (PSL- Crop Production), **Dag Falck** (PSL-Processing), **Ted Zettel** (Permanent PSL Project).
- The WG Conveners do not plan to work in a vacuum: producers will be consulted about specific issues on OFC Blog. Check InfoBio where Conveners will invite you to comment various issues. All received comments will help the Working Groups draft and propose pertinent amendments.
- Once ready to launch the review, the Canadian General Standards Board will reestablish the Technical Committee, who is composed of the voting members that will discuss and vote on the amendments proposed by the WGs. Four in-person meetings of the Technical Committee are planned over the two coming years.
- The OFC fundraising campaign is underway in Quebec, where solicited operators and retailers are generously supporting the review. Confirmed donors: [Aliments Trigone](#), [Viandes duBreton](#), [Fromagerie l'Ancêtre](#), [Fruit d'Or](#), [La Milainaise](#), [Coopérative La Manne](#), [Coop d'Alentour](#), [Rachelle –Béry](#), [Citadelle](#), [Metro](#). Many other organic producers are soon to be confirmed.

In September, fundraising will target other provinces. In Ontario, [Ash Street Organics](#) and [Harmony Whole Foods Market](#) have already contributed to the funding of the COS review, as well as the [Pacific Organic Seafood Association](#), in British-Columbia.

OFC will post very soon the “Organic Family Portrait” featuring a description of the activities of all the donors supporting the COS Review. Their role is essential: the application that OFC submitted under AAFC Agri-Marketing Program for funding the COS review is conditional to the industry participation to the funding of the project. Would you like to be included in the “Organic Family Portrait”? Contact OFC to become a sponsor.

- Contacted earlier this week, AAFC plans to issue a final answer about OFC application for funding the COS review by mid-September.



**Janine Gibson**

Convener of the PSL Livestock Working Group

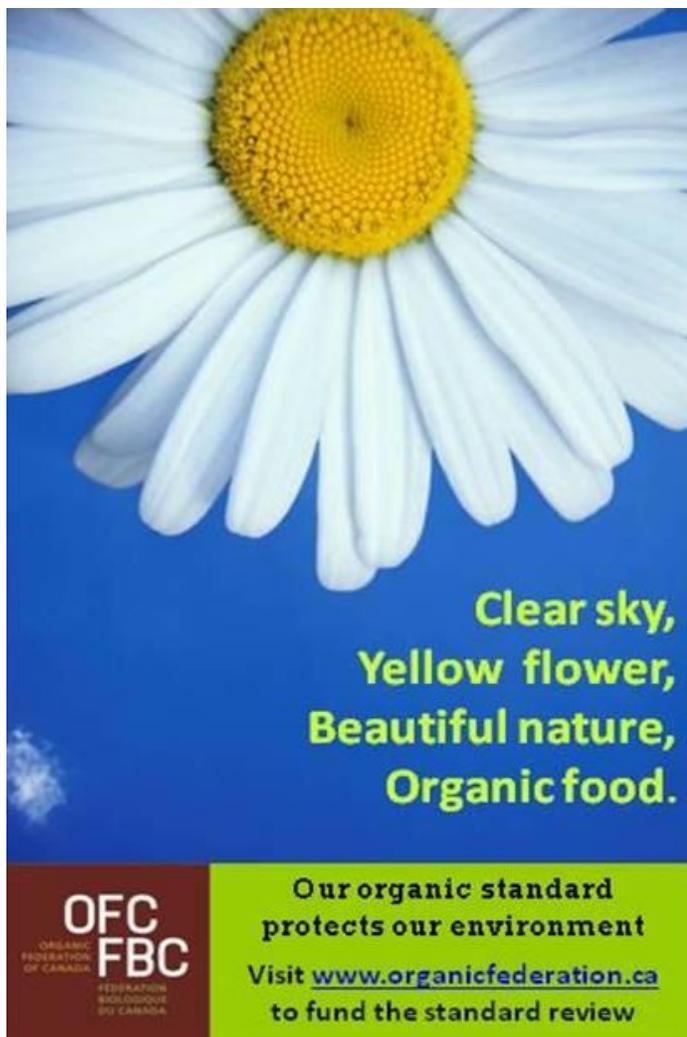
Actors of the COS Review

### **About being a Working Group Convener**

“I am a a convener because I deeply care about ensuring that our Canadian organic standard is practical yet truly reflects its important basic principles as tools for sustainability”.

“The main challenges of the COS review are to continue to build consistency & fairness for Canadian organic operators while more fully implementing the basic principles of organic production in the realities of the 2013 agricultural context”.

“By working together to understand the many bio-regional realities of agriculture across Canada we can together craft our organic standard to be a very, useful guiding tool in creating more sustainable food production”.



## The COS Review

### A major step for the Canadian organic industry

The revision of the Canadian Organic Standards will take two years, and will involve extensive national-level consultation with representatives of everyone in the value chain, from farmers to consumers. The sector's representatives will divide into working groups to assess and submit amendments to the COS. Proposed amendments will then be discussed by the Technical Committee, which will meet four times to reach consensus on all the amendments proposed by the nine working groups. Technical support will be required to document issues that are raised.

**The changes to the Canadian Organic Standards will impact all stakeholders in the organic sector. This crucial review cannot be completed without the financial support of the Canadian organic industry.**

**Are you ready to make your financial commitment to the review of the COS?  
Do you have additional questions?**

Contact the Organic Federation of Canada.

[info@organicfederation.ca](mailto:info@organicfederation.ca) – 514-488-6192

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## That Canada that is hungry: when the farm is not enough

NB: The present article was published last week-end by the [Montreal newspaper La Presse](#).

By Laura-Julie Perreault

(KILLAM, ALBERTA) Alberta feeds the world. The phrase is a recurring theme of the provincial government, like that of the food industry. The slogan, however, leaves farmers hungry.

At the age of 20, Takota Coen has a dream. A big dream. He is convinced that one day, he and the family that he will build will live from agriculture. At 100%.

Is this a dream to be reached with a tractor, do you think? Not so sure. Talk to the parents of Takota. Farmers for over 30 years in central Alberta, located on a 250 acre farm, they have never managed to reach above the poverty line by cultivating the land.

"If we lived only from agriculture, we would not starve, but we would live in the greatest poverty," said Michael Coen, 53, met on the sidelines of a demonstration against the use of genetically modified alfalfa organized by his son.

To make ends meet, Michael Coen is a full time carpenter, in addition, he grows hay that he sells to other farmers.

In recent decades, Michael Coen and his wife Laura have seen more than one Alberta farmer fall in a battle and sell his farm, unable to put enough food on the table. "Those who have larger farms are often worse off. They live deep in debt to grow wheat and canola. But who eats canola?" asks Takota Coen, who hopes to one day be at the head of a farm where livestock, organic cereals and vegetables go together.

### Young, broke, passionate

It is the same dream that drives Danny and Shannon Ruzicka. The young couple in their thirties and their three children recently bought a farm of 320 acres in central Alberta, close to Viking. They produce "new beef" fed through traditional

grazing only, chickens raised outdoors and organic pork. And vegetables of all kinds.

The setting is pastoral. During our visit, the sun was slowly setting over the farm while the couple's three children, back from feeding the capons, played on huge bales of hay.

However, this picture postcard setting hides a harsh reality. "We cannot make a living only on the farm. Danny also works full time as a blacksmith," says Shannon Ruzicka, sitting in the house she and her husband just built on the farm and that they pay for with their hard work. "In the summer, we work from 5 am to 11 pm in the evening. Danny must combine two full-time jobs, and I'll take care of the farm and of the marketing of our products," she says, as one who has also become a teacher in the winter. Her three young children, Madalynne, 8, Joshua, 6, and Molly, 3, are educated at home.

To publicize their work, every summer the two young farmers organize meal services on September 1 with Chief Blair Lebsack, a gastronomic star in Edmonton. The table is placed in the fields. "This is a magical moment that allows you to forget some of the frustrations shared by many young farmers," says Shannon, while visiting the barn where their chickens stay warm until the snow melts.

The farming couple comes to a conclusion: the Canadian agricultural system is sick. "We want so much to feed the world and export our products that we forget that our farmers have a hard time feeding themselves," says Danny who was raised on a large commercial farm, wealthy for his parents.

According to him, the poverty that afflicts many western farmers and forces them to take a second and third job to survive - as is the case for 70% of them - has a direct impact on food security of Canadians, who have little access to local products.

## Farm On

Alarmed by the precarious conditions in which many farmers find themselves as well as by the disappearance of farmers under 35 years of age, a group of Albertans established the organization Farm On.

Using social networks, the agency invites farmers from here and elsewhere to share their stories. And to start a real revolution. "The situation will worsen if young farmers abandon the battle because they are unable to take over the farm from their parents. In Canada, nearly \$10 billion agricultural capital must change hands in the coming years. How can this be if there are no more farmers under 35 years old?" says one of the founders of Farm On, Sara Wray, who owns a small farm with her husband in Bashaw.

"We wanted to get our parents' farm in 2002, but mad cow disease and drought hit Alberta. The family had to divest itself of the farm. We had to work in the city for several years before buying a small farm. It's been three years that we've worked very hard and we've covered about two thirds of the cost."

To ensure the sustainability of agriculture and food sovereignty in this country, Farm On wants to offer Canadians a wide range of solutions. The first is to directly link consumers with farmers. "Currently, for every dollar of food that is bought only \$ 0.14 goes back to the farmer, which does not make sense. People cannot build a life with that," she says.



**Don Ruzicka**

### The secret? Doing Less

Don Ruzicka will never forget the day the doctor told him he was suffering from Crohn's disease. "He told me, if you farm differently, you can heal."

Owner of a large commercial farm at the time, debt-ridden and cracking under the pressure, the Alberta farmer took the doctor's instructions. In 1995, he sold his ultra sophisticated machinery and parted with a portion of his land.

While the concept of "organic food" was just beginning to be better known to the public, the Killam farmer threw out garbage bags of pesticides, which he could not have done without in his old life.

A quarter century later, Don Ruzicka became the guru of organic farming in Central Alberta. Last year, he and his wife Mary, who shoulder the family business, received a prestigious award from the province for their environmental achievements.

The meat that he produces - beef, pork, chicken - is passed along to a small group of clients that Don Ruzicka knows personally. And when he looks at his bank account, he smiles. "I make my living a lot better with this approach than when I owned a farm four times larger," he smiles.

The secret? Do less. The Alberta farmer is happy to supply 50 families with protein. "My friends have farms of 5000 acres, I'm just 800." The farmer and his wife were able to pay off their farm faster. Operating costs, including energy, are extremely low. The pigs have taken the place of the tractor to turn the soil. The diversity of pollinating insects and birds that the farmer keeps contribute to the regeneration of the farm each year.

"Now, my greatest desire is to provide this legacy to my children or to young farmers who see things the same way we do," said the Alberta farmer.

## "The kick in the anthill"

"Completely ridiculous," according to Minister Jason Kenney. "Condescending" and "misinformed" by Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of the Environment. The Conservative government did not put the white gloves on when the UN rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter, came to Canada.

In a report released in March, the Harvard Professor of International Law reproved the federal government, claiming that the measures against poverty miss their targets, leaving too many Canadians in a precarious situation. "The situation in Canada, one of the richest countries in the world, is not that of Niger, but a country like Canada must still agree to look at what is really happening," said Mr. De Schutter, who was interviewed by La Presse from Belgium.

In its conclusions, the expert recommends that Canada adopt a national food security strategy, review the levels of social assistance and minimum wage and review its agricultural policies to address the problem of hunger that afflicts 8.2% of families in the country. "The ball is in the court of the Canadians," conceded Olivier de Schutter. "I hope the kick in the anthill that was my visit to Canada will spark a real debate."

From the report on agricultural policies: "Trade liberalization has harmed many Canadian farmers, whose net income fell and whose debt has increased dramatically in recent decades. Since the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States, [farm] debt has tripled, from \$22.5 billion to \$65 billion in 2007."

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