Info-bio

THE ORGANIC FEDERATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

August 26, 2020
Countdown to the publication of the 2020 Canadian Organic Standards
The weekly preview

Protecting biodiversity

All operators will be required to demonstrate that they are protecting and enhancing the ecosystem health of their operation.

Biodiversity is essential for healthy ecosystems and productive organic farms. For example, trees provide nesting sites for birds which devour cabbageworms. Wildflowers provide food for bees which pollinate crops, and provide habitat for beneficial organisms, such as tachinid flies which attack sawfly and armyworm larvae. Maintaining a diverse community of soil organisms increases nutrient uptake and retention, improves soil structure, and promotes symbiotic relationships between plants and soil microorganisms.

Floral strips outside the tunnel provide biodiversity and shelter beneficial organisms
at Wild Flight Farm, in Mara, C.-B.

Photo Margaret Graves

The 2020 Standard includes a new clause that will require
organic farmers to take concrete steps
to support the diversity of life forms on their farms.

Regardless of the size or type of their farm, farmers will have to demonstrate that they promote and maintain biodiversity. For example, the operator of a greenhouse on leased land can plant wildflowers around greenhouses. A rancher can fence off lakes and streams to prevent livestock from grazing and trampling the banks of water bodies. Field crop producers and market gardeners can leave wild areas on their farms: these include woodlots, shelterbelts and hedgerows between fields, and strips of flowering plants between crop rows.

The note to subclause 5.2.4 is intended to protect "existing native prairie, parkland, or wetland habitats." In the context of the Standard, a note is a recommendation rather than an enforceable requirement. The Crop Working Group discussed this issue at length and felt that it was too difficult, at this time, to specify the types of habitat that should be protected. However, the ultimate goal is to encourage organic farmers to both protect the wild areas on their farms and take more measures to increase biodiversity.

◈ The revised clause ◈

5.2.4 Management practices shall include measures to promote and protect ecosystem health on the operation and incorporate one or more of the following features:

a)   pollinator habitat;
b)   insectary areas;
c)   wildlife habitat;
d)   maintenance or restoration of riparian areas or wetlands; or
e)   other measures which promote biodiversity.

NOTE: Existing native prairie, parkland, or wetland habitats should be maintained and enhanced whenever possible.

Organic production systems: general principles and management standards. 32.310.
Draft approved August 4th, 2020 by the CGSB Technical Committee on Organic Agriculture.

Biodiversity in the podcasts
Organic Science Conversations

Discover how three Quebec scientists are investigating the use of floral strips to control pests in baby greens
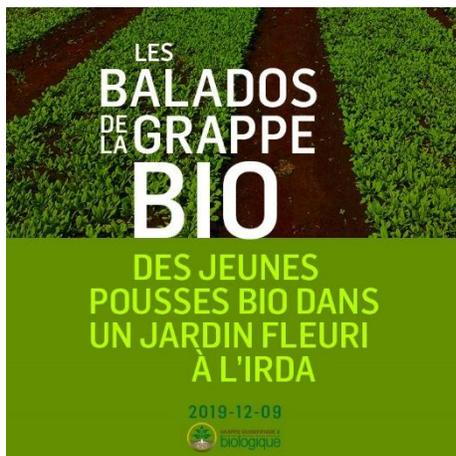
**Young shoots in a flowery garden at the IRDA [21:25]**

Sprouts are increasingly sought after by consumers: their flavour and freshness make them a food often consumed on a daily basis.
That's why an IRDA team led by Caroline Côté is looking into the production of organically grown shoots, young plants that pests appreciate as much as consumers. Read more.

To listen (in French), click here

To read the English transcript, click here

Hear or read about Dr. Jason's Gibb's research into using insectary strips in prairie field crops
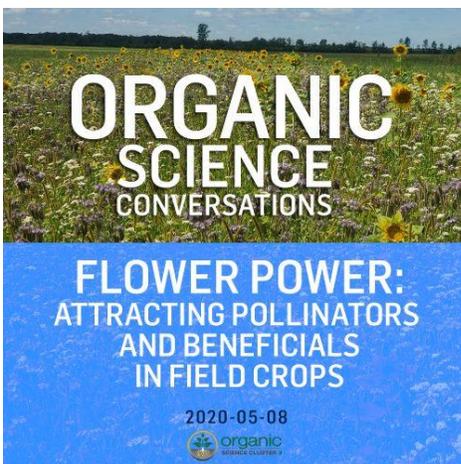
Flower Power: Attracting Pollinators and Beneficials in Field Crops [11:58]

Jason Gibbs is measuring how strips of flowers can influence the abundance and diversity of beneficial insects on both organic and non-organic farms. He will evaluate how the change in beneficial organisms can enhance pollination and biological pest control in both organic and non-organic farms in Manitoba. Read more

To listen - click here

No time to listen? You can read the interview with Dr Jason Gibbs - click here