

Info-bi

THE ORGANIC FEDERATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

Notes from COO Liaison Committee Meeting of April 11th 2011

Present: Stephanie Wells (COTA), Priscilla Reimer (MOA), Kelly Monaghan (Chair of CGSB TC & PSL WG), Dave Lockman (ProCert), Dag Falck (Nature's Path), Joanne Jackson Johnson (GoOFY/Yukon), Tomas Nimmo (Guelph Conference), Matthew Holmes (COTA), Gunta Vitins, John Hollinger (MAFRI).

COO – CFIA – AAFC: Carmen Hamilton (AAFC), Ken Bruce (COO), Michel Saumur (COO), Elizabeth Corrigan (COO), Valeriya Staykova (COO), John LeVatte (CFIA).

The Canada Organic Office (COO)

Though it is election time, the COO can answer questions and provide updates, but will remain silent about policy issues.

Canada Organic Regulations (COR)

The COO sent and published the [industry advisory](#) concerning the Stream of Commerce Policy (SOC) that will end June 30th 2011. People who have comments are free to send them to the COO. The OPR will be fully enforced starting July 1st 2011.

Canadian Organic Standards (COS)

- The amended standards following the 5th CGSB ballot should be published soon; approval was done at two levels and the standards are now under Standards Council of Canada.
- The [Standards Interpretation Committee \(SIC\)](#) has put a lot of hours toward preparation of final responses to Q1 to Q 68 and another list of Q&As will be posted. The COO will announce those new postings through regular channels.
- Some funding was issued to the CGSB Committee on Organic Agriculture (TC) to prioritize items and update the work lists of the COS revision. The Livestock working group and the TC were asked to comment on the US National Organic Program (NOP)'s request to remove ruminants from the stocking rates critical variances between Canada and US. The TC recommended waiting for the result of the next [National Organic Standards Board](#) (NOSB) meeting before assessing this NOP request, as stocking rates are on the [agenda of the April meeting of NOSB](#).
- No announcement for the funding of the full review of the COS; it is election time and the discussions could resume when the new government comes into place. Some funding options were drafted when the sector met with CFIA management in February and the OFC will explore those options.

International Equivalency Arrangements

Canada/US

The Terms of Reference of the [Technical Group](#) and of the [Steering Committee](#) on the US/Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement are now posted on COO website. The Steering Committee deals with administrative aspects of the US/Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement, while the Technical Group will mainly “develop and implement a process to assess the effectiveness of each other's control system to fulfill the requirements of the arrangement”.

In June, the NOP will visit for the peer review of the Canadian system. There was some confusion about label requirement in Canada; it was not clear to the US Accredited Certifying Agents (ACAs) that US products imported in Canada had to comply with COR label requirements (complying with OPR and being bilingual). Ken Bruce mentioned that the COO and NOP maintain compliance with [section 2 of the principles of the equivalency agreement](#) that established that “The trading partners must inform each other of any modification to their organic certification programs.” NOP advises Canada when NOSB meets; NOP could also be invited as an observer when the TC meets. The NOP wants to eliminate variances with the COS and the standards of the rest of the world; hydroponic and aeroponics will be reassessed by NOP, as well as the use of Chilean nitrate.

COO states that it needs the cooperation of the sector for maintaining effective discussion with the NOP and doing an efficient job. Otherwise, the COO would have to create its own advisory body to work on the standards.

Canada/EU

A 3 hour teleconference was held the same morning with the EU; progress was made and questions were clarified. The two parties will continue exchanging information and will follow up in May. There is no great divide and the COO is hopeful to have something in place before June 30th, when the SOC will be ending. If no agreement is settled, Canadian CBs will continue certifying organic products under the EU standards for products shipped to EU, and imported EU products will have to be certified to the COS or to the Canada/US Equivalency Agreement. EU had concerns about how GE contamination is assessed in Canada. The COO states that GMOs are not allowed under the COS; if there is suspicion or proof that they are used, the COO will take action: should the use be deliberate, the product would be decertified, if the use is not deliberate, the operator should find where the contamination comes from and take measures to eliminate it. EU seemed satisfied with this specification.

Canada/Mexico

Matthew Holmes (COTA) met many Mexican officials in a Canada/Mexico trade meeting held lately in Mexico. Information on the COR, the OPR, and on Equivalency was exchanged. Mexico has had a regulatory system in place since 2006, but the standards do seem to need more revision.

Aquaculture

EU drafted organic aquaculture standards and asked other countries to issue comments. An electronic working group will be established to enhance cooperation. The [Canadian Organic Aquaculture Standards](#) are currently under public review.

CB working group

Four COO training sessions were held with CBs between January and March. A CB working group will be created to help apply the BBC [Operating Manual](#) and make appropriate recommendations on certification issues. The COO drafted the Terms of Reference of this working group. Annual reports from CVBs and CBs due March 31st were received on time.

Next Conference Call: When Announced