

Chair's Report GoOFY AGM 2008

As I looked back over the past year, especially the growing season I can only conclude that it was a year of testing-- testing us and our farming abilities; mainly because of the weather. Except for the last month of summer and into September, it was relentlessly cold and wet, in my opinion, in my microclimate. The potatoes were trying really hard to grow, and I had lots of different varieties. I placed a lot of faith in the beautiful reds that we got from Garret and Heidi, as I figured that they were a few generations in the Yukon. But just as the plants would get going, and some were even blooming, a frost or two in a row would knock them down.

The cold weather, especially in July, was hard on the chickens. I thought I was feeding them enough but they just didn't gain like the year before. I had heard that the third year you raise birds is the trickiest, because you think you know how to do it and don't pay enough attention, or question what you are doing.

So there, I don't know whether everyone is in agreement, but that's my rant on the growing season.

Events and Activities 2008

COABC AGM and Conference Sydney, BC Feb 29-Mar 2, 2008

The new year started well with an interesting trip to Sydney, BC for COABC. Ten of us attended the conference. Overall, it was interesting. Highlights for me were a couple of presentations, one by Derek Lynch of NSAC on growing potatoes organically in rotation with grains and legumes. He is Chair of Organic Research at OACC and is very smart. I enjoyed a presentation by several people about marketing, especially the cranberry growers. George Hamilton from Ocean Spray. Great stories about how you have to keep changing your marketing strategies to make trends happen or to keep up with them. Got to see an inspiring film, *Tableland* about organic growers all over North America. We should get this film for a public event.

After the conference I got to visit Cowichan Bay Farm, after meeting Lyle Young in 2004 at Terra Madre. I got to see the chicken pens, not used in February, but instead the birds inside the buildings. The demand for his chickens rose so much that he started raising them year round in buildings. They are nice sunlit buildings with good air, but it has been challenging because of he just can't rest the buildings and now has diseases to contend with. Saw the middle of a day of slaughtering 2700 birds at Farmhouse Poultry, the local processing plant that Lyle and Fiona built with lots of opposition from the government. Every single bird processed there is seen by an inspector. The processing building is on the farm, a very old and small farm only 35 acres, almost right in Cowichan Bay.

Brian Lendrum and Susan Ross also stayed after the conference and visited Lori Bulow-Gillies at "The Cluck Stops Here" at Coombs BC. More discussions on government

involvement in meat processing. Other conference participants from GoOFY were: Leslie Peters, Michelle Murphy, Jan Broeders and Alex Ireland, Ken and Bonnie Nordeen, and Scott Snider.

Organic Animal and Poultry Feed

Early in the season Leslie Peters organized a big shipment of organic feeds from In Season Farms in Abbotsford. I think this shipment arrived at Matco in late April. I don't know what the total tonnage was, but it was really exciting to get it all at once at such a saving. Thanks to Leslie, Jeff and his friend the trucker and Lance at Matco for making it possible.

Fireweed Market Shipyards Park

It hardly seemed warm enough to begin but the Fireweed Market kicked off May 15. Fortunately for vendors and shoppers, the Frank Slims Building at Shipyards was open for folks to take shelter and warm up. The market was busy every week and most vendors did well, in spite of the cold, rain and wind.

The Fireweed Market expanded full time into a store and office in that building, sharing space with GoOFY and the Food Processors. Some of the Market Food Vendors also started to serve food on other days than Thursday in the Market Kitchen. These folks are also available to cater events in the Shipyards Building.

Yukon Farm Products and Services Guide

The new Yukon Farm Products Guide was produced in early spring by Jodi Crewe. It is now in printed version, free of charge while copies last and in electronic version on line.

Legume Culture Study Project

The Legume Culture Project completed its fourth year (of five) in 2008. Our new technician was Jodi Crewe. Legume plots remain at four farms, Lendrum Ross, Aurora Mountain, Dowdell and Digby (Dawson) and M'Clintock Valley. This year samples were sent to the Soil FoodWeb lab in Vulcan AB to assess the microbiology in the soil. It was a coincidence that I was engaged in a project to assess mesofauna in several Yukon farm and forest soils and also sent samples to Soil FoodWeb. It will be interesting to see what kind of creatures are living in the legume plot samples compared to mine. Next year we hope to be able to understand more about whether the addition of rock powders and no nitrogen to legume plots will help them establish and flourish in this climate.

GoOFY/OFC Outreach Project

During the summer of 2008 the OFC (Organic Federation of Canada) obtained ACAAF funding to promote organic agriculture across Canada. GoOFY partnered with the OFC to do an outreach project in the Yukon. I have taken on the contract to survey growers and processors in the Yukon who want to operate organically or possibly become certified. GoOFY will also be educating people about the new Canadian

Organic Standards. Claire Desmarais made the original proposal and has helped with the incarnations as our OFC rep.

Poultry Processing Group

The Poultry Processing group was busier than usual this past season. The number of birds processed this year was up forty percent over 2007. More birds were processed by the group's proponents and less by others using the equipment and for the first time, geese were processed by the group. All proponents are GoOFY members. As usual volunteers and customers provided valuable support on butchering days.

The Interns Project

A couple of GoOFY farms took advantage of the New Entrants section of YukonAPF funding to take on interns to learn about organic farming and help with the chores. The farms were Aurora Mountain and M'Clintock Valley. Having an intern at my place, the fantastic Lindsey, was great and also challenging, as I am used to doing everything myself whenever I can get to it. This summer I really had to try to organize the tasks.

I just got this on the COABC listserv in the middle of a conversation on farm school vs leaning on the job.

---I am reminded of a line from Paul St. Pierre's "Breaking Smith's Quarter Horse. When rancher Smith's wife suggests that perhaps Smith should attend a ranch management seminar he replies, "Hell, I'm not running this place half as well as I already know how to."

The question is ---what will happen this summer?

Fall Conferences and Meetings

Several GoOFers went to Food Secure Canada in Ottawa---Joan Norberg, who is on the Food Secure board along with Tom Rudge, who gave a presentation to the meeting.

Joan Norberg, Claire Desmarais and Matt Ball attended Organic Connections in Saskatoon and Claire and Matt stayed in Saskatoon for the OFC AGM.

Joanne and Cain and Michelle attended the North of 60 agricultural conference and banquet this year. Joanne delivered the presentation about the Fireweed Community Market for Simone Rudge who prepared the audiovisual presentation. It was the keynote presentation at this year's banquet.

Fundraising

As in past years, Tom Rudge made coffee and took donations at the Fireweed Market. He also talked up GoOFY and organic growing and solicited memberships. Thanks to Tom and Simone and Joan for doing the coffee fundraiser.

Year end and beyond

Many of us have been trying to escape from having to talk about the politics of farming and food for awhile and just spend our valuable energy growing food. Well, talking about growing is very useful and enjoyable. I think we just have to do it!!

JJJ November 2008