

**Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association)  
Minutes**

Sunday, March 12th, 2017  
1-4 pm at Whitehorse Public Library

Meeting began at 1:30pm

**1. Roll call**

**Present:** Kate Mechan, Shiela Alexandrovich, Bill Drury, Barbara Drury, Valerie Whelan, Mark Andruskiw, Joan Norberg, Brian Lendrum, Tom Rudge, Sarah Ouellette, Tomoko Hagio, Tony Hill, Jennifer Hall, Randy Lamb, Sofia Shumelda, Rachelle Dufour, David Russeau, Joanne Jackson Johnson, Bart Bounds, Minister Ranj Pillai, Allan Norberg, Kim Melton, Tamara Neely, Susan Ross, Kim Melton.

**Regrets:** Simone Rudge, Krista Roske, Claire Desmarais, Jodi Crewe, Scott Snider and Miriam Verhees.

**Approve appointment of chair/recorder.**

Chair - Kate, approved by consensus

Recorder - Sarah, approved by consensus

Timekeeper - Kate, approved by consensus

**2. Approve agenda and minutes from last regular meeting (February 5, 2017).**

Agenda: Amended to reverse points 3 and 4; remove point h.

Motion to approve by Tom, seconded by Brian.

Minutes from last meeting: Motion to approve by Joanne, seconded by Barbara.

**4. Discussion with Ranj Pillai (Minister of EMR) and Tony Hill (Agriculture Branch Director)**

**Minister Ranj Pillai:** Portfolios include Energy Mines and Resources and Economic Development, as well as Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation. Dealt with several "hot files" during first 100 days in office.

Grew up in Nova Scotia on grandfather's farm until age 10. Grandfather's farm was passed down for 4 generations. Farmed "organically", but didn't use that term - no chemical inputs; ate just from farm. Sees value of farming this way. Also grew Christmas trees to diversify. Noticed that their trees took twice as long to grow to harvest compared to competitors; better quality trees (needles lasted well past Christmas).

From Government perspective, mandate includes: support local agriculture, displace imported foods with locally grown produce; continuation of Growing Forward funding. Goal for today: get handle on what's happening. Hope to make it to meetings occasionally; want to visit some of our farms this summer. From Economic Development perspective: feed ourselves, feed Alaska. Upcoming projects to be announced soon will integrate Economic Development with Agriculture.

**Tony Hill:** Received a couple petitions about growing GM crops in Yukon in past. Tried to push through discretionary use zoning (with previous Minister); conventional local growers don't want GMs regulated. Ranj is looking into co-existence plans. Haven't gotten into a discussion with new government on GM crops yet. Trying to take a risk-based approach. Encouraged by fact that the GM

## **Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association) Minutes**

alfalfa that's been released in Eastern Canada is low-lignin; not well suited to our environment. No reason to grow it here; other types are much better suited to our environment.

**Minister Ranj Pillai:** Has an understanding of communications that went back and forth with previous Minister. Wants to spend time today to hear our input. Try to move ahead with evidence-based decision making. Notice there are concerns about timing. Understands our point of view - let's make some decisions soon. Possibility of GMO-free regions. What are the threats? Can we support growers who want to use GM's with alternatives? Sees that it's a huge priority for us.

### **Responses to GoOFY member questions**

- Tony: Previous Minister said they weren't going to pursue discretionary GMO use. Haven't proposed anything different. That's why we're here; want to hear your opinion on it.
- Minister Pillai: Will dig into proposal to look into discretionary use. Everything is on the table.
- Randy: Looking into co-existence plans across Canada; first developed in eastern Canada in 2013, western Canada in 2016. Alberta has provincial Weed Legislation; GM alfalfa was labelled as a noxious weed; there's enforcement and legislation. We can't do that here because we don't have that legislation. Buffer zones in coexistence plans are 3-5 km (1 km wouldn't be sufficient).
- Tony: Haven't officially started Ag Policy review. Minister has to go to cabinet to get permission to start public consultation (minimum 90 days). In research phase now.
- Tony: There will be one industry person on new Agriculture Branch Director hiring committee - GoOFY can nominate someone.

Shiela: A few years ago there was a YAA survey and about 75% of YAA membership was interested in GMO legislation. Saying that the GM alfalfa variety is no good here doesn't deal with this issue. YAA and GoOFY are more interested in working together now.

Barb: YAA Board didn't like the results of the survey and scrapped it.

Tony: We were told to stand down on the issue.

Jennifer: Will look into the YAA GMO survey. Been working on a rebuild of the YAA. Not a focus on conventional; just Agriculture.

*a) GoOFY will provide a history of efforts and documentation on accomplishments with respect to maintaining a genetically modified crop free region. Discussion on setting concrete goals in collaboration with Ag Branch and other stakeholder groups.*

- Tom gave GMO literature to Minister Ranj Pillai; included update on everything we've been working on.

Tom: We've been doing this for 11 years now, doing everything the government's been telling us to do. Every stage, a new road block. Senior policy analyst suggested to form a subcommittee to talk about the GM issue (with representatives from GoOFY, YAA, AIAC, etc). In the Organic Farming section of 2006 Ag policy, there's nothing concrete. GMO-free zones were mentioned in 'Multi-Year Development Plan for Yukon Agriculture and Agri-Food 2008-2012'; there was interest. Let's do this. If you read the documentation from last government, they always said it was "totally divisive". Wrong message.

Minister Pillai: Working on collaborative approach; will re-visit the idea of forming a sub-committee.

*b) 2006 Agriculture Policy Review: Discussion on policy review, particularly the Organic Farming section. What can the policy do to support the organic sector over the next 10 years?*

Brian: Why does ag policy specifically deal with commercial ag and not ag for self sufficiency? That's how I started, for about 10 years before I thought I was a farmer.

## **Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association) Minutes**

Tony: Anything's possible. 2006 policy moved away from "lifestyle". Input was for a more commercial focus. We're working on the Local Food Strategy, supported through GF2, with a focus on community gardens and other self-sufficiency initiatives.

Shiela: Ontario's policy addresses soil and soil health; regenerative/degenerative/sustainable - would be an important addition.

Barbara: The current policy is very restrictive of subdivision of agricultural land. If someone will make a 1x subdivision, doesn't have to be 15 acres, could be any number for better utilization of land (tailor to farming aspirations of buyer).

Minister Pillai: Whatever the initial goal of the Ag Policy was, some goals have radically changed. Need to look at all different policies now.

Tom: Thanked Tony for all the work he's put in over the years (retiring soon). What about the communication strategy for thin horn sheep issue?

Tony: Met with YAA board about 1 month ago. Communication strategy is coming out real soon. Working on posters to come out late March. Farmers need to tell their stories.

Tom: Message is "Keep them separate. Keep them safe." Pointed message. Farmers have to do due diligence; peer pressure.

Minister Pillai: Since taking on this role, received the most communication about this topic; diverse opinions. Has met with Minister. It's not about keeping things in; it's about keeping things out.

Shiela: Too strict. Many people who are buying sheep are small scale, hobby farmers. Can't afford double fencing. Can't access funding.

Jennifer: Message is vilifying farmers.

Tom: Get agriculture off bottom rung; get our own Minister of Agriculture. Provide agriculture grant on taxes.

Minister Pillai: Looking at tax incentives. Knows there's been some concerns about the Environment Department Veterinarian, funded 50% by Agriculture Branch. Looking into that. GMO and sheep issues are hot topics.

*Break - Minister Pillai and Tony Hill left meeting after the break.*

### **3. Standing reports**

#### **• Chair – Kate**

- City of Whitehorse Food Strategy - Larissa Lychenko of City of Whitehorse is putting together a map of local food sources; contact her at 335-2606 if you want to be part of this.
- Agriculture in the Classroom - In other parts of Canada, AITC is corporate-driven, teaching students about "Trashing Food Waste Through Technology", promoting GMO crops, GE salmon, etc. We don't want this kind of messaging in Yukon classrooms. Let's follow up at next meeting.
- COG Organic Vegetable Seed Production Course (Joanne circulated email on March 12th)
- From the Ground Up program: Kim Hickman (Health Promotions) is calling for expression of interest from producers for FtGU. Deadline is April 21st. ([http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/downloads/FTGU2017\\_Expression\\_RuralFarms.pdf](http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/downloads/FTGU2017_Expression_RuralFarms.pdf))
- Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research - 4th annual Community Garden Gathering is taking place March 14-15, 2017.
- Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition is doing a food cost monitoring project to develop a baseline for a family of 4 to buy food; no government department knows what it actually costs.

#### **• Financials – Simone**

See attached Worksheet-20170310.pdf

## **Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association) Minutes**

- **Yukon Agriculture Research Committee - Bart/Joanne**

- Apple shelter project (John and Kim's project)
- Mushroom project review
- Pollinator project in 2nd year (Maria Leung is continuing this project, focus is on berry farms)
- Naturally source nitrate for meat preservation (celery? swiss chard?)
- Mulching what's left from land clearing process, using it as a soil amendment

- **Organic Federation of Canada - Joanne** (attached)

- Update on COABC Conference, OFC and OVCRT meetings

**ACTION:** Joanne will ask Ag Branch to print copies of OMRI Canada Product List

- **Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee - Shiela** (handing over to Tom)

- Discussion with Tony and Ranj covered a lot of AIAC update
- GF2 committee member: doesn't matter if it's a GoOFY member, we nominate whoever we want
- Wind rows: Development plans for ag properties will include wind rows (how one disposes of materials resulting from land clearing). If someone chips, a larger dollar value should be attached, versus just burning.
- Soil health should be added to Ag Policy
- 40+ subdivisions since 2006. AIAC will look at what actually happened: more ag or less ag as a result? What has the 2006 policy *actually* done?
- Someone from GoOFY could be on the new Agriculture Branch Director hiring committee (to influence the process and decision making, but not final say). Joanne's interested.
- Next AIAC meeting is April 20th. Jennifer Hall has asked for agenda to be made 2 weeks in advance so there's time to prepare; action items to be circulated. Request was well-received by Tony.

- **Kids on the Farm - Sarah**

- 8 farms are participating as hosts this year (down from 10 last year)
- Farmers' Meeting is happening Thursday, March 16th to get familiar with program procedures and to share/learn ideas on leading farm tours and classroom visits.
- Short presentation on Kids on the Farm and the importance of building community through experiential education at the AICBR Community Garden Gathering, Public Event, Tuesday, March 14th, 7-9 pm at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

### **5. Old Business: Follow up/action items from last meeting**

a) GoOFY campaign on the awareness of GMOs and the importance of keeping them out of the Yukon (Tom, Kate, Bart, Barbara, Brian)

- Donation of \$500.00 was made to Canadian Biotechnology Action Network

b) Petition to Prime Minister to label GMO food in Canada (Barbara)

- No luck in printing petition
- MP Pierre-Luc Dusseault confirmed government will not accept online petitions; must be on paper.

**ACTION:** Joan and Barbara will continue to try and print petition off change.org.

c) Voluntary double fencing on sheep and goat farms (Tom and Brian)

- Talked about issue earlier with Minister Pillai and Tony Hill.

## **Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association) Minutes**

- Jane Harms (Program Veterinarian) said Animal Health Department doesn't know where the sheep farmers are (when first contacted in December); pressure from outfitters to pursue this issue.
  
- d) Department of Agriculture Veterinarian
  - *Department of Environment has a dedicated veterinarian, funded 50% by the Ag Branch. However, this veterinarian has demonstrated a bias toward wildlife and outfitters, and has not represented GoOFY farmers' values and objectives. Does GoOFY want a dedicated Dept. of Ag Veterinarian? What would we want the Dept. of Ag Vet to do?* (Discussed earlier with Minister)
  - Jennifer: YAA is speaking up about this, too
  - Discussed earlier. Minister Pillai will look into this issue.
  
- e) Canadian Organic Research Needs and Priorities Assessment (Bart) - attached
  
- f) GoOFY's position on YTG land clearing options (Barbara)
  - Minister took notes during earlier discussion; input on policy is done (Remove from next agenda)
  
- g) GF2 Committee doesn't have a GoOFY representative (Kate)
  - Shiela addressed issue in AIAC report (Remove from next agenda; GoOFY won't do anything)
  
- h) Commercial kitchen/food truck that could be shared like the mobile chicken abattoir (Bart)
  - Removed from Agenda
  
- i) Are our members/growers concerned about our available outlets?
  - *Our outlets might include Potluck Coop, Farmer Robert's, Fireweed Market, Mt Lorne Market, Riverside Grocery, Wyke's Independent.... Several of these venues are in flux.*
  - *Are we able to sell our products? Do we need to create new opportunities? Educate consumers?*
  - Joan: Always need to educate consumers. There's demand for produce; Allan set up a pop-up market on Fridays 10am-12pm at Takhini Gas - good response.
  - Brian: Hardly ever produce anything we can't sell; not a problem. Always thought market should go through month of September, but close earlier (e.g. 6pm).
  - Shiela: Mt Lorne Market - stock up for winter sale at end of season worked great!
  - Bart: Fireweed Community Market is thinking about doing that. Regular season is May 18th to September 14th this year. Maybe a couple weeks later, there will be a Harvest Sale (potentially closing earlier, e.g. 6pm). Last market will be like a party: music, races, hot cider, fire. No Saturday markets this year.
  - Kate: Challenge is labour crunch; retail outlets not a problem.
  - Jennifer: Miche Genest wrote articles about retail outlets; article is on hold because of Potluck Coop. Drafted articles on Farmer's Market and on Farm Guide, too.
  - Mark: What's happening with Farmer Robert's? Noticed less local selection.
    - On consignment; farmer must maintain product. Impractical for most farmers.
  
- j) [letstastecanada.ca](http://letstastecanada.ca) - Does GoOFY want to get involved? (Brian)
  - *Irena Forbs (food blogger) is drafting guiding questions to put forward to local grower groups across Canada and is interested in speaking with GoOFY members; highlights local food initiatives; blogs about what's happening on the local food scene across Canada; offers advocacy for consumer support of local growers.*

## **Growers of Organic Food Yukon (Association) Minutes**

- GoOFY members agreed to get involved.
- ACTION:** Kate will email her to say we're interested.

k) Farms.com - Does GoOFY want to join? (Kate)

- *Farms.com shares ag-industry news, distributes newsletters, media releases; could add GoOFY to their CRM (Customer Relationship Management). GoOFY is invited to join. Do we want to join?*
- JJJ signed up; GoOFY not interested.

### **6. New Business**

#### **Meeting Structure** (Kate and Sarah)

- *How do members feel about the current structure of our meetings and the duration? Do we want to form committees for various projects? These committees could meet outside of regular meetings or immediately after.*
- *Are members interested in making farm sharing and peer education part of our regular meetings? For example, the first 30-45 minutes of each (or every other) meeting.*
- Other ideas: greatest current challenge; best "innovation" or time-saving practice recently implemented; experiences growing a specific crop (potatoes, salad mix, etc); cold storage and/or root cellars; wwoofers vs interns; share favourite farming book; etc.
- May: Social, non-meeting; only April meeting before break for growing season
- Rachele: a year or two ago, mention in minutes about farmers visiting each others' farms
  - Mark, Brian and others really support that idea!

**ACTION:** Discuss plan at next meeting.

#### **Next Meeting:**

Sunday, April 9th, Whitehorse Public Library @ 1pm (room booked until 5pm)  
Please bring potluck snacks.

Meeting ended at 4:50 pm