

OTF UPDATE

An update on activities of the Government of Canada's Organic Production System Task Force

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OTF ON TARGET AS IT PREPARES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL ORGANIC REGIME

The Government of Canada's Organic Production System Task Force expects to meet its goal of making recommendations for a fair and effective national organic production regime this summer.

The initial round of stakeholder and provincial government consultations is complete. The research reports on existing accreditation organizations and certification bodies are finished. Other international standards have been examined and the cost-benefit analysis on options for an organic regime has been delivered.

The cost-benefit analysis is a mandatory factor when considering any new regulatory scheme. The report presents a breakdown of the costs and benefits of various options for a national organic regime. Additional analysis is provided for environmental benefits resulting from organic agricultural practices.

"We've emerged from four months of intense and inclusive coast-to-coast consultations with a keen understanding of what Canadians do and do not want to see in the proposed organic regime," says OTF Project Director, Joe Southall. Approximately 300 people and 65 organizations spanning all facets of the organic industry participated in more than 80 face-to-face meetings. "Our meetings gave us a sound understanding and appreciation of the variety of opinions held and approaches to organic agriculture that exist in Canada," says Southall. "Everyone's participation and candour was an immeasurable contribution to the task at hand."

Concepts raised during the consultations and under active consideration by the OTF include:

- One mandatory, national minimum standard for organic agriculture be established and maintained by the organic industry and enforced by the government;

- An inclusive regime for all growers, processors, retailers and importers that make organic claims, regardless of size or sales;
- The Government of Canada as overall competent authority to authorize accreditation agencies;
- The integration of existing provincial systems, accreditation agencies, and certification bodies into the federal regulatory system;
- One domestic accreditation for certification bodies which would be accepted or recognized nationally;
- Minimum educational requirements for organic inspectors and consistent national training by government and academic institutions;
- A comprehensive set of labelling requirements and a readily identifiable Government of Canada mark for all Canadian certified organic product;
- A national office in Ottawa to administer the resulting Canadian Organic Program – to include surveillance and enforcement of organic product; and
- A phase-in period for the organic industry to adapt to the new regime.

Developing and maintaining a strong national communication network across the sector was identified as a key challenge for an organic inspection and certification regime. The organic industry is working towards the establishment of a national industry association to interact with government on regulatory issues.

Keeping the system affordable, particularly the cost of certification for small-scale growers, was a common concern expressed by many during the consultations. Some disagreement with the idea of disallowing more than one certification mark (the Government of Canada mark) on a product was also recorded. Solutions to these stakeholder concerns are presently being considered by the OTF and will be brought forward in the recommendation package.

Read Anne Macey's report to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada:
"Certified Organic" The Status of the Canadian Organic Market in 2003":
http://www.agr.gc.ca/misb/hort/index_e.cfm?s1=org-bio&page=intro



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