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## Welcome to "ON Organic"

*Hugh Martin, Organic Crop Production Program Lead, OMAFRA*

Welcome to the September newsletter of ON Organic. Hard to believe that summer is over. As we finish up harvest on the farm it is time to be planning for next year. Making notes on what can/should be improved, what worked what didn't. The fall and winter season is also a season when seminars and courses increase. Plan to attend some sessions and be prepared to learn at least one new thing at each event.

Thank you to our growing list of subscribers and those who pass it on to their colleagues, especially EFAO, COG and OCO.

To subscribe to this newsletter or to find us on the web, go to the webpage:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/subscribe/index.html#organic>

The English versions of these newsletters are available at:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

The French versions of these newsletters are available at:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/french/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

As always I welcome your comments [hugh.martin@ontario.ca](mailto:hugh.martin@ontario.ca)

## The ON Organic Team

Hugh Martin – editor, OMAFRA, Organic Crop Production Program Lead  
Jack Kyle – OMAFRA, Grazier Specialist  
Dorene Collins – OMAFRA, Customer Service and Marketing Program Lead  
Helen Prinold – OMAFRA, Client Account Officer (your link to the organic food industry)  
Hugh Berges – OMAFRA, Manager Horticultural Technology  
Linda Cooper – OMAFRA, Client Service Representative

## Production Insurance for Organic Crops

Agricorp has developed Production Insurance options that improve coverage to reflect the premium prices that organic farmers receive for their product. There will be an insurance plan in place for organic wheat and spelt producers in 2009. This is the second year of this plan. Agricorp also offers a separate Production Insurance plan for organic soybeans.

Production Insurance (PI) is a risk management tool that guarantees a level of production and protects Ontario farmers from yield reductions due to adverse weather, insects, and disease.

### Eligibility

To participate in the organic insurance plan, the land on which the crop is grown must be certified by an accredited certification body in the current crop year. A copy of the certificate must be provided to Agricorp. All wheat acres or all spelt acres must be insured.

### Enrolment

To apply for insurance for the organic wheat and spelt crops, contact Agricorp by **November 1, 2008** at 1-888-247-4999, Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**For more information** visit the website at [www.agricorp.com](http://www.agricorp.com) or call Agricorp at 1-888-247-4999.

### Planting Deadlines

The planting deadlines for these crops varies with region.  
 For areas with > 2700 crop heat units (CHU) – Oct 31  
 For areas with < 2700 CHU – Oct 20  
 East of Belleville and >2700 CHU – Oct 10  
 East of Belleville and < 2700 CHU – Oct 1

Note that wheat following a wheat crop is not insurable. Wheat following a corn crop is only insurable if good farm management practices are followed, check with Agricorp for details.

### 2009 Premium Rates for Organic Plans

Premiums are cost shared with the federal and provincial governments. For most insurance plans producers pay only 40 percent of the required premium. The charts below outline the customer's share of the premium:

#### Customer Base Premium Rates (\$ / acre)

Coverage Level	Organic Winter Wheat	Organic Winter Spelt
75%	\$6.67	\$5.39
80%	\$8.38	\$6.76
85%	\$10.37	\$8.37
90%	\$12.92	\$10.43

#### Fixed Claim Prices and Reseeding Benefits

	Organic Winter Wheat	Organic Winter Spelt
Claim Price	\$11.29 per bushel	\$0.48 per kg
Reseeding Benefit	\$80 per acre	\$80 per acre

## **Planting the Seeds for More Agri-food Innovation**

### **Premier's Innovation Awards Program Invites New Applications**

#### **News**

Innovators in the province's agriculture and food industry are encouraged to apply for awards under the Premier's Agri-Food Innovation Excellence Award program, now accepting applications until December 1, 2008.

The \$2.5-million, five-year program (currently in its third year) was established to recognize innovators who contribute to the success of Ontario's agri-food sector. The awards program includes the Premier's Award (up to \$100,000), the Minister's Award (up to \$50,000) and up to 55 regional awards of \$5,000 each.

Program applications must be received by December 1, 2008, and will be reviewed by two independent panels made up of representatives from across Ontario's agri-food industry. Additional information and application forms are available on the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs [website](#).

#### **Quotes**

"This awards program is a great way to showcase the wonderful diversity of products Ontario's farmers provide. By encouraging more ideas and innovations, we are helping to build a stronger future for this and the next generation of Ontarians." - [Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty](#).

"Ontario's farmers have helped build a world-class agri-food sector in this province. By recognizing their hard work and investing in their innovative ideas, we can help farmers pursue new markets, attract investment and strengthen our rural communities." - [Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs](#).

#### **Quick Facts**

- Since its launch in 2006, the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence has attracted 358 applications highlighting on-farm innovations.
- Ontario's agri-food sector is the second-largest goods manufacturing industry in the province (after the auto industry) and contributes \$30 billion to the economy every year.

## **OMAFRA New Directions Research Program**

### **New Directions and Alternative Renewable Fuels "Plus" Research Program—Call for Proposals: 2009**

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) is issuing the 2009 Call for Proposals for its New Directions and Alternative Renewable Fuels 'Plus' Research Program.

Letters of Intent are solicited that will generate new knowledge and/or technologies in the following areas:

- New Frontiers in Sustainable Production Systems
- Organic Agriculture
- Capturing Value in Emerging Markets
- Environmental Sustainability
- Life Sciences
- Alternative Renewable Fuels 'Plus'

**The deadline for receipt of Letters of Intent is Friday, September 26, 2008 at 4:00 p.m.**

In the past two years this program has funded five research projects for a total of approximately \$875,000. See the website for full details of the 2009 program at: [http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/research/new\\_directions/index.html](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/research/new_directions/index.html)

## **Ontario Cattlemen's National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Project**

### **Enhancing Profits and the Environment through Grazing Management**

#### **What is a Grazing Mentor?**

A grazing mentor is a respected producer peer with extensive grazing management experience and knowledge. He can suggest grazing management options to help you improve your profits, your forage productivity, and your land and water resources.

#### **What help can I get?**

A Grazing Mentor from your area will come to your farm to discuss your grazing resources, opportunities and challenges. A grazing mentor will:

- Make suggestions about fencing, watering systems, grazing systems, plant growth, forage species, winter grazing options or just about anything you may have questions about!
- Be available for phone follow-up to help you in the decision making and the implementation of your new grazing management choices
- Provides about 16 hours of mentoring with you

#### **How do I find out more and get introduced to a Grazing Mentor?**

In Ontario call:

Paul Stiles, Ontario Cattlemen's Association  
Phone: 519-824-0334, Toll Free: 1-866-370-BEEF (2333)

## Articles from Other Newsletters

### Roots: The Basis for Production

Anne Verhallen, *Soil Management Specialist/OMAFRA*

A good root system is critical to the final yield of any crop, including vegetables. Irrigation and fertigation may deliver right to the plant all the inputs needed but roots still do more than just anchor the plant. Roots help to store carbohydrates and the water and nutrient absorption and transport.

Many vegetable crops start out as seedlings with a basic tap root and as they grow continue to develop lateral roots and finer roots. Under good soil conditions these lateral roots should head off into the soil at about a 30 degree angle from the plant. If you see roots making a ninety degree angle, there has been some sort of barrier like soil compaction that has prevented the plant root from developing normally. It is critical to keep these lateral roots healthy, they are responsible for **90 % of the water and nutrient uptake** after the seedling stage is complete.

From Hort Matters, For complete article see: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/news/hortmatt/2008/21hrt08a2.htm>

### Canada Thistle Management Strategies for Sustainable and Organic Farming Systems

Abram J. Bicksler and John B. Masiunas, *University of Illinois*

Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is a vigorous, perennial weed that spreads by a fibrous root system or wind blown seed. Canada thistle is considered a noxious weed and has become a common problem of sustainable and organic farms. What makes Canada thistle such a problem weed? It can rapidly spread, forms dense patches, suppresses growth of crops, and is poorly controlled using standard approaches. Tillage can cut the roots into small pieces, spreading patches; tillage equipment can also carry root pieces to new sites. Mowing must start at thistle flowering and be repeated numerous times. Common winter annual cover crops (i.e. cereal rye, hairy vetch, wheat) are not present during the most susceptible growth stages of Canada thistle.

What are the key factors to controlling Canada thistle? It is a long-day plant; flowering and seed production starts in July through August. Shoots must be killed to prevent seed production. Emerging Canada thistle seedlings will not survive shading from other plants. Grow competitive crops that rapidly close canopy. Thistle plants store sugars and other carbohydrates in their roots. The stored carbohydrates allow thistles to overwinter and emerge in the spring or

after disturbance. Established Canada thistle is best controlled after emergence at the beginning of flowering, when root carbohydrate reserves are lowest. Depletion of these reserves will reduce the thistles' fitness and ability to re-grow from roots.

Our research combined tillage, summer annual cover crops, and mowing to control Canada thistle. Sudangrass alone or combined with cowpea (70:30 sudangrass:cowpea) produced 13 to 14 Mt/ha of biomass. Sudangrass alone or combined with cowpea caused a 96 percent reduction in thistle density in the first growing season. One year after planting sudangrass, thistle numbers were still below 10 percent of the beginning densities. Neither buckwheat nor a summer fallow adequately suppressed Canada thistle. Mowing is less important for reducing thistle fitness and survival compared to the Sudangrass cover crop.

We recommend disking thistle-infested areas several times during the spring to eliminate emerged thistle, prevent flowering, cut roots into small pieces, and create a uniform seed-bed for sudangrass. In early June, drill a sterile sudangrass hybrid such as "Special Effort" at 55 lbs/acre into the freshly prepared seedbed. The thick sudangrass canopy can shade out Canada thistle. Sudangrass may be mowed when 4 to 6 feet height to manage cover crop growth and prevent flowering of surviving Canada thistle. Use a flail mower to create a surface mulch and encourage sudangrass regrowth and tillering. In late fall or early spring, incorporate the sudangrass residue into the soil and plant a competitive crop. Use cultivation, hand-removal, or spot treatment with herbicides or flaming to control any remaining Canada thistle.

From New Agriculture Network. For complete article go to <http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/issues08/8-12.htm>

There is also a second article at this link on the Biology of Canada Thistle by the authors. From New Agriculture Network. For complete article go to <http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/issues08/8-27.htm#2>

### Hoop houses for season extension: Are they right for you?

David S. Conner, Ph.D., *C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems, Michigan State University*; Adam Montri, *Michigan State University Student Organic Farm*

Collaborative efforts by Michigan State University (MSU) and Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) have developed a research and outreach program which tests the contributions of passive solar greenhouses (also known as high tunnels or hoop houses) to farm profitability. This program, funded in part by USDA\*, project.

efforts of Dr. John Biernbaum of MSU's Department of Horticulture and his pioneering work at the MSU Student Organic Farm. Subsequent funding has further expanded the scope of this project. From New Agriculture Network. For complete article go to <http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/issues08/8-12.htm>

## **Mulch Your Tomatoes to Fight Weeds, Retain Soil Moisture and Save Money**

*Adam Davis, USDA-ARS Invasive Weed Management Unit, Urbana, IL and Jon Cherniss, Blue Moon Organic Farm, Urbana, IL, USDA-ARS Invasive Weed Management Unit, Urbana, IL*

Mulches are often used in organic vegetable production because of their benefits in conserving soil moisture and suppressing weeds. Some of you reading this may be thinking to yourselves, as we did prior to our study, "Yes, mulches work, but are they cost-effective?" We set out to answer this question for fresh-market tomatoes on a diversified organic vegetable farm in Urbana, Illinois. The study began in summer of 2007, and is being repeated in the summer of 2008. This project was made possible by the combined support of North Central Region SARE project LNC04-251, Blue Moon Farm and the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

### **How did the mulches do their job?**

Our mulches suppressed weeds by preventing sunlight from reaching the soil surface, and boosted tomato yields by reducing evaporation of soil moisture and reducing water use by weeds. Mulches suppressed weed seedling emergence and growth by blocking sunlight from the soil surface. Soil moisture was greater in mulched plots than in the bare soil treatment. This may have been due to reductions in evaporation of soil moisture due to the mulch cover, reduced use of soil moisture by weeds, or a combination of both factors. Tomato yields increased with increasing soil moisture. Although the crop was irrigated, apparently there was enough moisture stress to result in yield loss.

### **What happened, a farmer's perspective**

The farm netted an additional \$500 from mulching 300 feet of paste tomatoes. That's nearly 10 times the cost of mulching. The improved yields appear to be due to increased moisture levels in the mulch treatments. However, this was unexpected because we irrigate our tomatoes. Evidently we don't irrigate enough. We also suspect that our irrigation management, or lack thereof, during the three-week harvest period further amplified the contribution of the mulch in our dry year. Typically, we stop irrigating tomatoes once harvest begins to avoid splitting and help concentrate tomato flavor. Although we might not have seen the large yield differences in a wet year, this year mulching paid off significantly. In fact, we made enough extra to pay for mulch for the next 10 years even if

they are wet years. **Better weed control, cleaner fruit, reduced weed seed populations** and **improved soils** from the addition of large amounts of organic matter are just icing on the cake. From New Agriculture Network. For complete article go to <http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/issues08/8-12.htm>

## **Niagara Region's Local Food Action Plan Initiative**

Niagara Region is encouraging comment on the Niagara Local Food Initiative Discussion Paper.

Regional council has embarked on a Local Food Action Plan Initiative. Initially, the Region's role is to assist in the formation of this initiative through the development of an action plan based on input from various stakeholders, such as farmers, processors, retailers, consumers, distributors and politicians. This initiative is a way to promote the purchase and consumption of local foods and mitigate Niagara's carbon footprint.

The development of a local food initiative in Niagara can contribute to Niagara's economy in several ways, notably through securing and developing markets for local producers, expanding existing distribution, while also offering opportunities to enhance tourism.

There are many issues to consider as part of a comprehensive local food initiative for Niagara, ranging from agricultural land preservation, environmental, economic, including marketing and branding, cultural, to technological, and political. All of these issues are highlighted in the discussion paper created by Niagara Region to initiate a public conversation on this topic.

The discussion paper is informative, yet meant to generate ideas, comments and suggestions.

"The survival of a local food initiative will be determined by many factors ranging from the production of local food, processing of raw materials, maintaining and enhancing markets for that produce, to improving technological innovations and the preservation of farmlands," said Patrick Robson, Acting Commissioner of Planning Services at Niagara Region. "More importantly, there has to be a strong desire to participate. As Niagara residents and consumers we all have a vested interest in getting involved."

Interested parties are encouraged to read the Discussion Paper on Niagara Region's Website at [www.regional.niagara.on.ca](http://www.regional.niagara.on.ca) and provide your comments and recommendations by emailing: (deadline was August 28, 2008 but your comments may still be noted).

## Events

### Learn how to Maximize your Returns at Trade Shows

Planning, promoting, implementing, following-up and evaluating are some of the keys to maximizing your show results. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is offering a workshop to help you prepare for and get the best results from trade shows.

The workshop will be delivered by Barry Siskind, an internationally sought after trade and consumer show expert. Over the past twenty-five years he has travelled throughout the world working with thousands of clients in virtually all industry groups including the food sector, helping them improve their results at trade and consumer shows. Barry Siskind is the author of six best-selling business books including his latest book “Powerful Exhibit Marketing”.

The workshop will be offered in two locations:

- Monday September 29, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm, Cobourg
- Tuesday September 30, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm, Smiths Falls

Location details will be provided with your confirmation notice.

Pre-registration is required by September 22. To register, contact Mariam Alikhan at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Email: [mariam.alikhan@ontario.ca](mailto:mariam.alikhan@ontario.ca)

Phone: 519-826-4474 or 1-888-466-2372, ext. 64474

Please provide your name, company name, phone number and email address. Please specify which workshop location you plan to attend.

### Great Lakes Community Shared Agriculture Conference

Seeding the Future – Growing Together!

November 21-23, 2008

Geneva Park Conference Centre, Orillia, ON

<http://www.csaconference2008.ca/>

OMAFRA, working together with Community Futures Development Corporations, has developed two seminars on how to “Double Your Show Results” with noted food show training expert Barry Siskind. The seminars will be held in

Cobourg on September 29<sup>th</sup> (1-4 pm) and Smith’s Falls on September 30<sup>th</sup> (9am – noon). For more information, costs and instructions on how to register contact Rita Byvelde in the Belleville office at 613-962-4170.

### Grocers offer Special Sessions and Pricing for Ontario-Based Producers and Processors

- November 19th - access to the full conference program in Toronto
- September 23rd, a special ½ day program is offered for new CCGD Ontario Conference attendees.

For a registration form, please call Jeanette Lee at CCGD - 416-922-6228 ext. 331 or email her at [jlee@ccgd.ca](mailto:jlee@ccgd.ca).

See <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/2008-08a7.htm#grocers> for full details from August issue.

### Wal-Mart New Ontario Supplier Fair – Wednesday, September 24, 2008

See August Newsletter for details. There will be a registration fee of \$100 per person. Seating is limited so you are encouraged to register early.

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/2008-08a7.htm#walmart>

### 2008 Outlook Conference – Thursday, November 13, 2008

Gain insight and new perspectives on the latest innovations in Ontario's agri-food sector by attending this international forum on innovation in agriculture, food and beyond. This year, our prestigious biennial conference will take place at the historic Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto, Canada. To register or for conference details visit <http://www.outlook2008.ca/en/index.php>. For the early bird conference rate you must register on or before September 30, 2008.

### Annual Organic Conference, January 22 – 25, 2009

Annual Organic Conference – U of G (workshops, training, seminars)

Theme— “O” is for Opportunity. Workshops and large trade show. This conference is annually attended by 1,500 to 2,000 people from all segments of the organic food value chain. For further details, visit

<http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>

## New Factsheets

**OMAFRA - Programs and Services for Ontario Farmers**, Order Number 08-037. This 20-page factsheet is a summary of programs and services currently available to Ontario farmers that are funded by the Ontario and/or Canadian governments. Producers should also check with their commodity organizations for additional commodity specific programs that may be available through their associations. Available at: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/08-037>.

**OMAFRA - Options for Farmers Dealing with Financial Difficulties**, Order Number 08-033.  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/08-033.htm>

**OMAFRA - Farm Succession - Do's and Don'ts**, Order Number 08-037.  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/08-043.htm>

**OMAFRA - Farm Fencing Systems**, Order Number 08-035.  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/08-035.htm>

**OMAFRA - Livestock Access to Watercourses**, Order Number 08-013.  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/beef/facts/08-013.htm>

**Purdue - Using Organic Fungicides** - This New publication focuses on organic fungicides. For horticultural professionals and homeowners looking for info on using organic fungicides, Purdue University is offering a new publication, "Using Organic Fungicides." Written by plant pathologist Janna Beckerman, the 4-page brief offers strategies for properly using organic fungicides and describes these products. Beckerman writes that to effectively use any type of fungicide (organic or otherwise) requires a solid plant-health management strategy. <http://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/BP/BP-69-W.pdf>

## Links to Organic Agriculture Information

**Organic Council of Ontario (OCO)**  
<http://www.organiccouncil.ca>

**Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO)**  
<http://www.efao.ca>

**Canadian Organic Growers (COG)**  
<http://www.cog.ca>

**Organic Agricultural Centre of Canada (OACC)**  
<http://www.oacc.info>

**OMAFRA Organic Agriculture**  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/organic.html>

**Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300**  
**E-mail: [ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca](mailto:ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca)**  
**Northern Ontario Regional Office: 1-800-461-6132**

**[www.ontario.ca/omafra](http://www.ontario.ca/omafra)**