

The Challenge of Local and Fresh Organics!

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St. John's has a couple of speciality stores that have always carried some organic, especially dry products. The organic sections of our Super-Stores are steadily expanding. According to a recent Press Release, February, 06, Wal-mart is throwing its weight behind organic products, to meet consumer demand. However, most these products are shipped thousands of miles away, using fossil fuel, oozing away their nutrients mile by mile and robbing our young people of employment and experience in growing organically.

Although consumer demand may be increasing, organic production in our province is basically invisible. There are two organically certified vegetable producers, The Organic Farm and The Lien Farm, one certified blueberry farm and a few farms that supply free range chickens, lamb and pork. According to Merv Wiseman, President of Federation of Agriculture, the increase in farming in this province has exceeded all other provinces in the past few years, but not so with organics. There are no incentives for transition to organic or a pro-active source of information about growing organically, forth coming from within the provincial government. Those of us now growing organically, have learned by trial and error, building soil which takes several years, trying various kinds of organic and untreated seeds for our short season climates, paid our own way to workshops and conferences outside the province; also the cost of the Ontario based, Organic Certification Inspection, which takes place annually.

In the twelve years, we have been unfolding the Organic Farm, there has been no pro-active information, not one single workshop or consultation on Organics provided from within the province. Although we have not yet created sufficient effective practices to break even, we have successfully grown many, many varieties of vegetables such as artichokes, fava beans and herbs not normally grown in Newfoundland. We have also moved away from using any manure based soil building material to materials such as crab and shrimp meal, fish emulsion, kelp and introduced green manuring such as clover and oats to build soil and reduce green house gases. Our dream is to arrive at self-sufficiency through the Veggie Coop, a bulk buying club, along with an on site gardening centre, which supplies organic supplies to local backyard gardeners and a vegetable market which supplies fresh organic vegetables, fruit and herbs on site. But, presently, we must grow primarily for high end restaurants which is often different from what

families like and enjoy and puts our locally, produced organic food out of the reach of any people.

Let's use Hope Magazine to help create a voice for organic for our children and for ourselves. Those of us who are up until 3 a.m. In the morning going through six different seed catalogues to find organic, short season seeds that will grow in our climate, or studying the newly proposed organic regulations in Canada or with our heads in the bean and onion rows, pulling weeds to avoid pesticides, do not have the time and energy to create a movement- but that's what we need. The Provincial Wellness Committee, established a couple of years ago is alive and well and is emphasizing nutrition, food security and healthy environments. We need to be asking where does organic fit into this scheme of things? There is no reason that production of organic food, especially traditional crops such as carrots, potatoes, beets, cabbage and onions and other cold weather crops such as lettuce, peas, celery, spinach cannot be increased by a thousand times. Even greenhouse crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers and eggplant have tremendous potential. We need and emphasis on supporting local farmers to transition toward Organics because it is better for the environment and better for our health. Even one set of consultations, workshops or traveling road show would be a start. Eventually, it will include a supply management scheme like the egg or pork marketing boards, to get Organics into local box stores.

Organics falls under the Agri-food industry which is within the Portfolio of Honourable Minister Ed Byrne, Minister of Natural Resources, which also includes guess what? Forest Resources, Geology, Mining, Electricity and Oil and Gas. No wonder Organics does not even have step-child status in this Portfolio.

So, this week and every week, when you go to a super-store, or even Wal-mart (God Forbid) to look for organic food, send an e-mail to Ed Byrne, reminding him that accessing local organic foods is critical to the health and well-being of our children and of ourselves. My guess is that as little as ten e-mails a day, will be sufficient to bring Organics into focus. Let's do it!

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