

The Canadian Organic Grower



Community Shared Agriculture

Canadian Organic Growers
Cultivons biologique Canada



Summer 2008

The Canadian Organic Grower

DEPARTMENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Editor's Corner | 4 |
| Building the CSA farm movement | |
| President's Report | 6 |
| Letters to the Editor | 7 |
| COG Publications | 34 |
| Coming Events | 35 |
| Ask a Certifier | 36 |
| Organic Nation | 40 |
| British Columbia | |
| Alberta | |
| Saskatchewan | |
| Manitoba | |
| Ontario | |
| Quebec | |
| Atlantic region | |
| Green Clippings | 59 |
| COG Library Update | 62 |
| Reviews | 63 |
| <i>Animal, Vegetable, Mineral</i> | |
| Reader's Write | 64 |
| Classifieds | 65 |
| Worm's Eye View | 66 |

Contributors for this issue: Shiela Alexandrovich, Emily Board, Daniel Brisebois, Peggy Carswell, Gavin Dandy, Julie Fine, Brenda Frick, Janine Gibson, Willy Grant, Robin Guard, Carolyn Herriot, Pamela Irving, Rupert Jannasch, Heather Kepran, Anne Macey, Dorothy Marshall, Stuart McMillan, Frances McGinnis, Debbie Miller, Katrina Simmons, Av Singh, Kristine Swaren, Laura Telford, Glenn Wanamaker, Sylvia Welke, Daphne Wellman, Chris Wells, Suzanne Westover, Dan Wiens, Mark Wilson

FEATURES

| | |
|--|----|
| Small is what we have! | 8 |
| Shiela Alexandrovich describes how her homestead in the Yukon grew into a cooperative CSA. | |
| Raising sheep organically | 12 |
| Anne Macey describes the success of Chris Boettcher's organic sheep farm. | |
| The four S's of successful tomato growing | 15 |
| Carolyn Herriot provides useful gardening tips. | |
| My carbon-neutral CSA | 16 |
| Mark Wilson reveals plans for his CSA in Newfoundland. | |
| Fertile ground | 20 |
| Peggy Carswell links Vancouver Island growers with farmers in Assam, India. | |
| Cooperation in Quebec | 24 |
| Daniel Brisebois and Emily Board explain how their CSA functions at la ferme coopérative Tourne-Sol. | |
| Local and organic in Saskatchewan | 28 |
| Brenda Frick describes a COG/SOD initiative to enable and encourage the consumption of local organic food in Saskatchewan. | |
| Everdale CSA | 30 |
| Gavin Dandy provides details on how the Everdale CSA works with other farms in southern Ontario. | |
| Investing in the future through CSA | 38 |
| Rupert Jannasch suggests an alternative path for future community shared agriculture. | |
| Co-opérative La Mauve | 54 |
| Glenn Wanamaker delves into the workings of the inspiring Co-opérative La Mauve in Quebec. | |
| Shared generations | 56 |
| Dan Wiens recounts the origin and discusses the future of the Wiens Shared Farm, Canada's first CSA. | |

Canadian Organic Growers
Cultivons biologique Canada



FERTILE GROUND

By Peggy Carswell

It's 10:35 p.m., and I've just arrived at my quarters after another long work day. At this hour, the streets are empty, except for the ever-present cows, who slowly turn their heads towards me as I race by on my trusty purple Rainbow-brand bicycle.

It's the third day of Rongali Bihu, the biggest festival of the year here in Assam, India. The month-long event celebrates the arrival of spring and the start of a new planting season for rice.

Today unfolded much like any other day. It started early with a cup of chai, fragrant with fresh ginger and cardamom, followed by a couple of hours of quiet time working on the plan for a small bamboo building to house our new compost tea production unit. I drafted a flyer that explains the goals of our project and put the finishing touches on the training program. Then off to the Adarsh Seuj Prakalpa office to meet with the three college and university students from Vancouver Island who've been volunteering with our non-governmental organization—Fertile Ground—for the past ten weeks.

My husband Kel and I made our first visit to Assam in 1998 and fell in love with its lush green hillsides,

rich cultural diversity and wonderful food. We returned a year later. Inspired by a fair trade coffee project established by another non-profit organization from our home town, I located a supplier of organic tea and helped set up a small fair trade tea project with the World Community Development Education Society.

Since that time, revenues from the sale of the tea have helped cover the cost of producing resource materials in the Assamese language. We have also purchased tools and provided growers with hands-on training in the preparation of compost and the use of botanical formulas for improving the soil and controlling insect pests.

In 2002, with the support of CIDA, COG and volunteers from our community, a young agricultural development officer, Monalisha Gogoi, travelled to Vancouver Island to attend the 14th IFOAM Organic World Congress. For Monalisha, it was a rare opportunity to meet with farmers, educators and



Two staff members examine a display of plants used to prepare formulas for improving soil fertility and reduce losses caused by insect pests and plant diseases.

researchers from many different countries, including her own. Assam is geographically and culturally isolated from the rest of India. Insurgency and social unrest have destabilized the region for the past twenty years, and it's a part of India that few travellers—Indian or international—venture into.

Initially, I worked with a small group of young Assamese tea growers who wanted to learn how to grow tea organically. I was appalled by the quantities of chemical pesticides and fertilizers tea companies and market gardeners were applying to their crops, and aware that there was virtually no information or support for traditional or organic farming practices. By 2003, a group of friends from the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island helped me establish a new organization called Fertile Ground: East/West Sustainability Network.

For the past two years, our volunteers have worked side-by-side with the people of Digboi, a small town close to the India/Burma border, to develop a demonstration garden and resource centre promoting sustainable agriculture. It's located on two acres that had housed the families of workers from the local oil refinery until layoffs resulted in demolition of their living quarters. Before work on the garden could begin, a small mountain of broken bricks, rocks, old shoes, glass

and disintegrating plastic bags had to be removed.

Today, the land is lush and green. There are papaya, mango, guava, custard apple and peach trees, and rows of raised beds filled with a wide variety of vegetables, herbs and flowers. A large area has been set aside for stock-piling straw, cow dung, leaves and other discarded plant material. To add biomass and nutrients to the soil, our two gardeners, aided by volunteers, have prepared several rows of compost (5 m/15 ft. in length) and two vermicompost bins.

Last year we completed a small building that houses a library, office and open-air classroom. We then hired a project manager and outreach worker from the local community. They will develop the

project site further and provide training and support to farmers, women's self-help groups and small-scale tea growers.

Since our arrival in early February, our volunteers and staff have met with over 400 people at the site or at training sessions. Most are farmers, tea growers, or members of self-help groups or non-governmental organizations. Some are teachers, tea garden workers



Peggy Carswell and Erin Harper. Erin is a young organic farmer who was once the coordinator of Salt Spring Island's COG chapter, Island Natural Growers. In 2006, she volunteered with Fertile Ground in Assam.



Peggy explains how mulch can be used to control weeds, feed beneficial microorganisms in the soil and reduce the need for frequent watering.

and college students. Others have turned up just to find out why this group of foreigners has come here and what information we have to share.

A group of women farmers travelled three hours to visit our project. They're determined to find alternatives to pesticides and fertilizers. The chemicals are recommended by the Agriculture Department's field staff, who, along with "agri-business specialists," visit farmers and promote hybrid seed varieties and a steady regime of chemical inputs.

A group of young men from a farming community have started a nursery to collect and grow some of the local citrus varieties that are at risk of being lost forever. There are no longer any local seeds for sale in the market, and people seemed resigned to the fact that most of the traditional rice varieties are no longer being cultivated. And as each year passes, I see more signs of people

sacrificing their kitchen gardens and the surrounding jungle to earn extra money selling green tea leaves to the local bought-leaf factories—destroying the biodiversity of the region and depressing the already low prices paid for tea leaves.

Fertile Ground has lots of plans and dreams—but the shortage of skilled resource people and the limited amount of time we're here each year are significant challenges. With our support, a new course in Organic Horticulture will start next month at a local college. We plan to build a small "green shop" at the garden where we'll sell organic vegetables, vermicompost, local seed varieties, sticky traps, plant-based formulas for controlling insects and improving the soil, as well as local food and handcrafted items. And we're starting work on a plan to locate and propagate local seed varieties. Pompy Ghosh, our project outreach worker, made a

seed register to take on visits to village areas. Kaylin Henry, one of the Environmental Technology students from BC's Camosun College, designed a sign for the garden that explains why saving local seeds is so important. Already people are coming forward to identify traditional varieties of seed they're willing to share.

Many people here know about work being done by Canadians like Dan Jason (of Salt Spring Seeds and the Seed & Plant Sanctuary of Canada) and Mary Alice Johnson (a past president of COG). They recognize the faces of several organic growers and members of Comox Valley Growers & Seed Savers from the videos and slide shows we've presented. This year, Fertile Ground received assistance from faculty members and students at BC's Malaspina and Camosun Colleges, and we'd love to find more ways COG members and post-secondary institutions can help projects like ours—something to follow up on when I get back to Canada.

Peggy Carswell is the coordinator of Fertile Ground, a COG member and community development worker from Vancouver Island who lives and works in Assam for several months each year. For more information about Fertile Ground's work, visit www.fertile-ground.org, or email fertile_ground2003@yahoo.com

Photo on page 20: The area in front of the classroom which is being made into a children's garden using the 'lasagna' gardening technique.

Photos provided by Peggy Carswell.