Organic Agri-Food Growers Survey
Results and discussion

## Your Business

**1. What is the status of your organic operation?**

2 transitional
5 / 1-3 year transitional
12 certified organic

**2. Please rate the importance of these factors in your decision to be an organic farmer**
(1 unimportant, 2 somewhat important, 3 important, 4 very important, 5 extremely important)

**INSERT RANKING TABLE HERE**

In order of importance / number of growers (of 19) who rated the following as extremely important motivating factors

**High ranking**
Quality of life / enjoyment of farming 14
To provide good food for self and family 11
Create sustainable local food source 11
Practicing ecological sustainability 11

**Moderate ranking**
Concern about genetic modification 6
To earn an income 6
Promoting public awareness of local organic 5

**Low ranking**
To establish a niche business market 3
Keeping family tradition Very low 2
To grasp an investment opportunity / business case 1

Comments:
Unlike the statistics commonly connected to conventional agriculture, organic growers in our sample group rated **"*keeping family farming tradition – generational aspects of farming*** very low on the scale of motivating factors for choosing organic farming. Only 6 / 19 growers reported that their parents had been involved in agriculture.

50 % reported that their Grandparents or Great grandparents were involved

So what is enticing people to choose organic growing as a career? Not surprisingly income earning potential was not at the top of the list! Many of the local organic growers are choosing to farm based on social values and personal health. INSERT QUOTE FROM R JEHN & T FRASER ARTICLE REGARDIN HEALTH. The n number one ranked reason for entering the organic growing sector was the quality of life that it affords. Next in line was the motivation to provide a healthy food source for self and family, creating a sustainable local food source, and concern for environmental sustainability. All of these issues are directly related to "HEALTH".

***Health values appear to be a critical motivating factor for CRD small-scale organic farmers as overall economics are unfavorable***

Growers have told us that they made a conscious choice to enter the sector sometimes leaving behind established careers, in fact 11 / 18 ( %) of the farmers we surveyed began farming when they were 35 or older. Of these, 7 / 11 (%) went straight into organic agriculture.

**3. Are you aware of any current market / growth opportunities for organic agriculture and food in the CRD?**

15 / 18 reported yes … most organic farmers are well aware of the growing market opportunities in the Victoria region

**4. Would you like to expand your organic operation?**

16 / 18 answered yes

**5. do you plan to increase your production of current products or services within the next 3 years?**

100% answered yes

**… If yes how do you plan to do it?**

11 / 18 increasing production during the season
12 / 18 expanding into winter crops
9 / 18 greenhouse growing
1 / 18 other … tree crops & wild crafting

**6. Do you plan to diversify your organic agricultural operation products within the next 3 years?**

1 / 18 unsure
3 / 18 no
14 / 18 yes they will diversify

**… If yes how do you plan to diversify?**

6 / 18 plan to start new crops or move into new livestock
3 / 18 plan to engage or and develop some element of organic agricultural education as part of their business
***** 0 reported agri-tourism ********
12 / 18 diversifying into processed food / value-added production
(6 / 18 reported that they plan to diversify by means of two or more of the above areas)

**7. Please describe the major barriers that stand in the way of expanding / diversifying your operation?**

business training
money , capital, energy
capital for equipment and business development, ownership of affordable land, lack of organic growing experience, time to learn & develop skill + time to get work done
no barriers just lead time to plan
access to land & capital
farming is mostly an individual effort, access to government and related resources is low
physical, logistical & financial barriers
Need for man / woman power
Need for labour, my own physical limitations, need for more land
Land tenure obstruction, local government by laws that make subsistence agriculture and agroforestry illegal
workload, labour, time limitations
access to land and equipment
having to get certified at a high cost passes the cost on to the consumer
Need of an approved kitchen on site
access to land

access to land, aging body
lack of capital, unsure if retailers will "buy locally" they can get it cheaper from California for cheaper

**8. What percentage of your operation is Value-added food processing?**

7 reported 0%
5 reported 5% or less
4 reported 10%
2 reported 30% (both were salad mixes)
Average VAFP =

**9. Reporting on land**

**total owned acres reported 214.90**
11 / 18 organic operations reported owning land

of these 5 reported owning 5 or less acres
2 reported acreage between 5 & 10
2 reported acreage between 10 & 15
1 reported over 38 acres
the remaining total is heavily weighted by one large farm that holds 115 acres

**total owned cultivated acres reported 55**
The total goes down significantly when looking strictly at acreage under cultivation. This indicates that there may be land available to expand onto depending on it's soil quality etc…

It also indicates that organic farming is generally an intensive small scale activity due to the heavy human labour requirements, cost of labour, the lack of conventional inputs, and the diversity of the crops.

5 / 11 reported 1- 3 acres under cultivation (small is significant in organic farming)
4 / 11 reported 4-5 acres
1 reported 8
1 reported 18

***A recent business plan developed by a group of seasoned organic growers proves that acre of organic land on the Sannich peninsula can yield $25 000 in annual income***

**total leased acres 13**
**total leased cultivated acres 12.5**

6 / 18 reported leasing land
the cultivated leases that were reported were mostly very small parcels
3 @ 1 acre or less
2 between 2 & 5 acres
1 @ 6 acres
(again small is beautiful)

**total shared acres 23**
**total shared cultivated acres 5**

only two growers reported sharing land
acres in cultivation:
2 acres & 3 acres
**10. Please explain any barriers that you face in accessing land for farming**
we have access to free land to farm but cannot build a home on the land
capital / no equity, farm business not accepted as viable

shared tenure is illegal in bc
capital
neighboring property's trees shading out sunlight
good accessible land is hard to find in Sooke area even thru LLAFF. Land owners only willing to give short term leases. Can't afford to buy land at this time
Time, need for labour, expense
lack of capital to purchase land, land is expensive

**11. How does your present land situation impact on your long term farm plan?**
farming the land allows me to pay off the property& to continue improving the property value
hesitant to put too much time, sweat, energy into land that we do not own
we can farm long term
insufficient land to earn livelihood solely from farming
owning land affords some expansion and diversification potential
I vet the land so I can't make any long term plans
I can't expand much more without clearing land
adequate for now, with equipment that I have I can't farm more land
I am limited to annual crops which require more labour than perennial crops and afford lower prices than crops such as berries. BC situation temp .. I don't plan long term
it has limited my potential to grow more

**12. How many acres, if any of arable land do you have, but do not use for agriculture?**
Total of 36.5 acres

**13. do you plan to expand onto this landing the next three years?**
9 growers reported uncultivated arable land
4 / 9 reported plans to expand onto this land

**14. How many additional acres, if any, are you planning to purchase, lease or share in the next 3 years?**
A Total of 22 additional acres is being sought
Of these, 2 farms hope to add 10 acres each & 2 farms hope to add 1 acre each

## Support for Expansion & Diversification

15. Insert chart

**Top ranking supports:**
**A larger farm pool of appropriately trained workers**
This category was rated very high importance to growers (12 / 18 - % ranked importance 4-5)
**Capital to access appropriate technology 50%**
**Government financial assistance programs for small – mid sized businesses 50%**
**Research & development focused on organic growing 50%**

All other supports ranked low on importance

**This is an area where a number of gaps are apparent:**
a) Growers are saying that they do not need support for business planning skills but at the same time they do need capital. However, the lenders are telling us that business planning is an essential missing element Growers who hope to gain access to capital in equity poor situations need to present strong and well proven business plans (reference finance notes)
Retailers are also telling us that the growers need to develop their business skills

b) The fact that this group does not feel they need support accessing the market indicates tat the supply is spoken for at the farm gate or not far beyond via direct marketing farmers markets, bow programs. Retail markets that exist outside of this require volumes and levels of organization and infrastructure that does not exist at this point in the CRD

c) No interest in co-operative form of organizing and resource sharing was shown. This may partly be due to a general lack of knowledge and understanding about what a co-op is. Interviews with growers uncovered a general distaste for structured organization. This seemed to stem from fears that it could lead to large-scale industrialization & cooptation of the sector by outside interests, marketing board style regulators. Many growers did not have an understanding of the shared ownership principles of co-ops, the self- help aspects. Growers feared loosing profits to a middle-man / broker. Many growers operate in informal cooperatives already. Many growers appreciate the direct marketing aspects of their small operations.

d) Although overall access to land is a barrier to accessing the sector, it was not the key stumbling block to expansion / diversification … most growers explained that they would have a hard time increasing their production on the land they already have due to lack of time & skilled labour. Capital for improvements and equipment such as greenhouses and tractors was also a barriers to expansion.

e) Many growers did not know what community development finance was and this likely impacted the low score on this question. However, in a focus group that was held after the surveys had been completed, CDF was explained and many of the growers expressed interest and excitement in the possibilities that CDF present to their grassroots industry

**Marketing your Organic and Transitional produce and foods**
**39. Please √ your methods for marketing your organic produce / processed foods**
**Top 4 methods**
box program / csa 14 / 18 (77%)
farm gate 11 / 18 (61%)
farmers market 11 / 18 (61%)
small retailer 11/ 18 (61%)
restaurant 10/ 18 (55%)

u-pick 3 / 18 (16%)
wholesaler 3 / 18 (16%)
large retailer 4 / 18 (22%)

A majority of the CRD organic growers sell their produce through direct farm marketing, at the farm gate, organic produce box programs, community supported agriculture, and local farmers markets. Some of the growers also sell their produce to small retailers and local restaurants.

INSERT TABLE

95% of the growers surveyed engage in 3 or more methods of marketing

Very few CRD growers currently market to wholesalers or large retailers

CRD organic growers