

# Special

# Going organic

Health and environmental concerns driving demand

**W**hen Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* 50 years ago this week, she focused attention on the dangers of pesticide use. Today, many consumers choose organic foods due to concerns about the environmental impact of conventional food production. Others choose organic for health reasons, an approach supported by a June 2012 report from the Ontario College of Family Physicians that recommended the public reduce its exposure to pesticides whenever possible.

After Gail Gordon Oliver was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001, she shifted to organic foods as part of her recovery process. "Before my diagnosis, I cooked good, healthy food for my family but I did not pay much attention to its source," she says. "We also ate our share of junk food and fast food."

Since then the Toronto resident has followed an organic diet as much as possible. "I don't know if switching to organically grown and raised meats and produce has made a difference in my physical health" says the founder of Edible Toronto, a print and online publication, "but mentally it has had a huge impact, which can be just as important."

Ms. Gordon Oliver tries to buy

locally, but cautions shoppers not to assume that because produce is sold at a farmer's market it has been grown organically. "I am a strong advocate for local food, but I'm cautious with my purchasing. I don't buy local strawberries and peaches, for instance, unless they're organic."

A health concern also motivated Tammy Ingrao to adopt an organic food lifestyle. Last September, her son, now four, was found to be allergic to gluten, eggs and dairy products. "He was very small for his age and we realized something was wrong," says the medical secretary from Cambridge, Ontario. This news meant a radical, and challenging, transformation in the family's eating habits – avoiding packaged foods and restaurants in favour of making meals from organic ingredients.

Although the results were worth it (her son is doing much better), Ms. Ingrao says that going organic takes extra time and effort, especially for someone with two young children. "I have to plan meals days ahead and make sure I have the foods on hand to prepare what we're going to eat."

Contrary to popular thinking, she says, eating organic is not necessarily harder on the family budget. Although the food itself

can be more expensive, "because we rarely eat out it's actually less costly."

Since switching to organic, Ms. Ingrao is far more aware of what she eats. "Probably 99 per cent of people don't read or understand food labels. Nor do they know how their food is grown, how much land it took, what's in it. I didn't even know there was a problem with our food before."

Margaret Tourond-Townson, a retired teacher and vice chair of Canadian Organic Growers Ottawa, also became interested in organic food for health reasons. She helped launch a pilot program called Senior Organic Gardeners (SOG) to encourage seniors to grow and enjoy organic produce. In its first phase, SOG spoke at

**"Probably 99 per cent of people don't read or understand food labels. Nor do they know how their food is grown, how much land it took, what's in it."**

Tammy Ingrao  
is an organic food convert

two retirement homes about the many benefits of organic food and helped residents plant organic gardens.

"There were mixed results because of many factors," she says, "but overall it was a great success. We are now looking for funding to expand."

One of her most rewarding moments was when a senior was planting seedlings. "Tom had gardened before, but he had hand-mobility issues and was slower than the others. He was called for lunch before he finished and I suggested he stop and eat. He looked me in the eyes and said, 'This is a feast for me. I'll eat later.' It was wonderful. I just sat back for a minute and said to myself, this is why I'm doing this."

## THE ORGANIC STANDARD



### Natural, sustainable or organic – what's the difference?

They might seem like synonyms, but there can be a significant difference between food labelled 'natural,' 'sustainable' or 'organic.'

'Natural' food can easily contain genetically modified ingredients or be grown with pesticides. 'Sustainable' food, like 'local' food, can mean many things to many people, and has no set definition or requirement to meet specific criteria set by government or other third parties.

In Canada, organic food must meet stringent national regulations and is subject to independent inspections overseen by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency before it can be labelled organic and carry the Canada Organic logo.

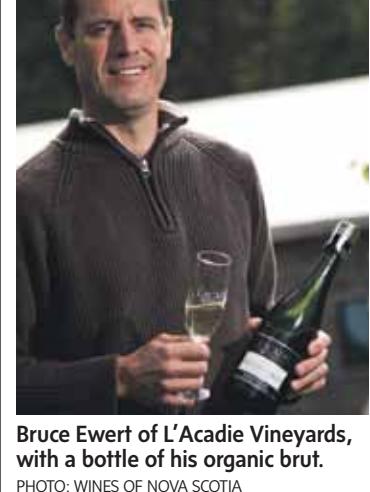
## PROFILE

# Organic wine producers bring new meaning to green grapes

"I wouldn't make wine any other way," says Bruce Ewert, referring to the organic wine he produces at L'Acadie Vineyards in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley. "There are so many chemicals in our diet and I don't want to add any more through my products."

Mr. Ewert is one of a growing number of Canadian winemakers dedicated to making 100 per cent organic wine. "At first we sold mostly to farmers' markets," he says. "Now we see a lot of growth in liquor retail stores as well. There's more enthusiasm and more demand for it in Nova Scotia, no question."

Eric von Krosigk, the winemaker and viticulturist at Summerhill



Bruce Ewert of L'Acadie Vineyards, with a bottle of his organic brut.

PHOTO: WINES OF NOVA SCOTIA

Pyramid Winery in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, oversaw the winery's transition to certified organic status in 2006. "We trumpet how great our wine tastes and add, oh by the way, it's also certified 100 per cent organic."

Organic wine, which should have an accredited certifier's logo or name on it, is made from grapes grown organically. The wine-making process must also follow Canada's strict national organic standards that cover everything from what is used to clean the equipment to prohibiting many common additives.

"The inspectors put us under a microscope and pull us apart," says Mr. von Krosigk. "They come in and ask who picked your

grapes? Who is the driver of your truck? Where are the bin tags? They want to know everything that went into the making of the wine. It's an incredibly transparent process."

Bill Redelmeier, who with his wife Marilyn owns Southbrook Vineyards in Ontario's Niagara wine region, uses the principles of biodynamics to produce organic wines. Biodynamic winemaking applies a holistic approach to the soil, plants and animals involved in the growing process.

"We harvest wine depending on the phases of the moon," he says. "The sprays we use in the vineyards are homeopathic herbal teas. We have ruminants, mostly sheep, in the vineyard (for

manure) because their digestive process is gentle and what comes out the back end is basically the same stuff that goes in the front end."

No matter how the wine is made, what matters most is taste. "I don't think there's an organic wine taste," says Mr. Ewert. "I believe that wine made organically has a better expression of its terroir. The flavours are more clear."

"Taste is subjective," says Mr. Redelmeier, "although organics score on average one or two points higher in tests. The beauty of organic wine, however, is that you know what you're drinking has no chemicals in it. And that the land it was made on is being farmed in a sustainable way."



Celebrate  
organic  
food, farming & products  
in Canada

Find out more about special  
events, promotions & contests  
across Canada!



Facebook (/organicweek)  
Twitter (@organicweek)



## ORGANIC FOOD AND WINE

## REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

# Natural health products popular with Canadians

**V**itamins and minerals, herbal remedies, probiotics and homeopathic and traditional medicines fall into the category of natural health products (NHPs). Their ingredients and purposes vary but they share common characteristics: they are available over the counter, their medicinal ingredients must be derived from a natural source and they must be approved by Health Canada to be sold in this country.

At least 10,000 retail outlets in Canada sell NHPs, from pharmacies and health food stores to mainstream supermarkets, and Canadians clearly find them valuable. The natural health industry has annual sales of \$3-billion and more than 70 per cent of Canadians use NHPs – 45 per cent of them on a daily basis.

"For many Canadians, NHPs are part of their healthy lifestyle," says Helen Sherrard, president of the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), which represents

## EDUCATION

The Canadian School of Natural Nutrition has a visionary approach to preventive health care – believing there is a link between food, its source and a healthy consumer. As such, the CSNN supports organic farming, and along with its students and graduates, is an ambassador for a green, healthy lifestyle. CSNN's Natural Nutrition Program is a progressive and practical science-based program leading to the R.H.N.™ designation.



**"Canadians use these products for many reasons – preventing or treating an illness or condition, reducing health risks and maintaining good health."**

Helen Sherrard  
is president CHFA



Sold over the counter, natural health products are used to maintain or improve overall health. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

the natural health sector.

"Canadians use these products for many reasons – preventing or treating an illness or condition, reducing health risks and maintaining good health."

The market includes NHPs made with organically grown natural ingredients. Some consumers choose to buy organic products to support environmentally sustainable farming

that the vast majority of Canadian consumers, 71 per cent, consider NHPs to be safe," says Ms. Sherrard.

The safety of NHPs, along with their efficacy and the accuracy of health claims, is currently regulated under Canada's Food and Drugs Act, which positions NHPs as a subset of drugs.

In 1998, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health concluded that NHPs, being neither food nor drugs, should be defined separately in the Act. "The industry has been waiting for 14 years for this recommendation to be enacted," says the CHFA president. Ideally, the association would like to see a new Natural Health Products Act – and the Ipsos Reid survey found that 7 in 10 Canadians support that idea.

"We recognize that legislative change takes time," says Ms. Sherrard. "In the meantime, we are working with the federal government on ways to make the regulatory system more efficient, so that the rules continue to ensure that NHPs are safe and effective but that consumers can still access the products they need."

## TOURNE SOL CO-OPERATIVE

## Organic practices are the foundation of a successful co-op farm in Quebec

**T**he roots of the Tourne-Sol Co-operative Farm began in 2000 at McGill University, where a group of students in agricultural and environmental programs built friendships and discovered shared values and goals.

"We all had a passion for the environment and agriculture's role in creating social and food justice," says Daniel Brisebois,

one of the five owner-workers of the 12-acre farm in Les Cèdres, Quebec, 60 kilometres west of Montreal. "By the time we graduated, we knew we wanted to be organic farmers."

After working independently for a time, the five – including two couples – came together to establish Tourne-Sol in 2004. Products include 50 varieties of vegetables, as well as fresh herbs,

cut flowers and dried herbal teas and seeds – all certified organic. The co-op hires apprentices each year to train other young people wanting to farm organically.

One of the core elements of the business is a community-supported agriculture program. "Customers pay in advance for a weekly basket of vegetables throughout the growing season," explains Mr. Brisebois. "This gives us some upfront funds to cover early-season costs and provides families with very fresh local produce."

Co-operative farms are quite rare in Canada, he says, but in his view, the advantages are numerous. "Although we plant, weed and harvest together, we each develop expertise in different crops and divide up the business tasks."

Sharing the responsibilities gives the owner-workers a more balanced life, he adds. "And we're all gratified to be involved in the type of farming that produces a healthy soil ecosystem as well as high-quality, healthy foods."

## STANDARDS

## Production principles aim to support a healthier world

Organic production is based on principles that aim to increase the quality and durability of the environment through specific management and production methods. They also focus on ensuring the humane treatment of animals.

The general principles of organic production that form Canada's national organic standards include:

1. Protecting the environment, minimizing soil degradation and erosion, decreasing pollution, optimizing biological productivity and promoting a sound state of health.
2. Maintaining long-term soil fertility by optimizing conditions for biological activity within the soil.
3. Maintaining biological diversity within the system.
4. Recycling materials and resources to the greatest extent possible within the enterprise.
5. Providing attentive care that promotes the health and meets the behavioural needs of livestock.
6. Emphasizing careful processing and handling methods to maintain the organic integrity and vital qualities of food products at all stages of production.
7. Relying on renewable resources in locally organized agricultural systems.

# "Always Leave the Earth Better Than You Found it."

~ Rupert Stephens



OrganicBiologique.ca.



Interested in organic foods?

## BC Organic Ambrosia Gift from Nature

Savour the honeyed  
sweetness and juicy crunch  
of Organic Ambrosia!

Organic Ambrosia is a sweet, low acid apple that is slow to brown when sliced. Ideal for snacks, salads and desserts.

Ask your local grocer for BC Organic Ambrosia – the Original Ambrosia.

**Ambrosia®**  
ORGANIC



Get the full story on Ambrosia at [www.organicambrosiaapple.ca](http://www.organicambrosiaapple.ca)

© owned by Wilfrid and Sally Mennell and used under license by the New Varieties Development Council Organic Ambrosia Growers. Photo by Lone Jones Photography.

**Eat well. Do good.**  
[naturespath.com](http://naturespath.com)



@naturespath [facebook.com/naturespath](https://facebook.com/naturespath)

## FOOD LABELLING

# Concerns over genetically engineered foods shared by consumers and farmers

**T**he significant growth of genetically engineered (GE) crops in Canada – such as canola and corn – might suggest that Canadians have accepted genetic engineering as part of the modern food production system.

However, many stakeholders in Canada have never abandoned their serious concerns about the potential environmental and health risks of foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Among these stakeholders are members of the organic food industry; organic certification includes assurance that products are grown and processed GMO-free.

According to some organic industry spokespersons, recent developments are once again raising the profile of the GMO debate. One such development is Okanagan Specialty Fruits' applications in both Canada and the U.S. to market the Arctic Apple, which is engineered not to turn brown when bruised or sliced.

"GE technology is the greatest threat to organic food and food in general because there is no wall high enough to prevent cross-pollination from GE crops to non-GE crops," says Arjan Stephens, executive vice-president of sales and marketing with Vancouver-based organic food company Nature's Path Foods Inc. "This threat from the Arctic Apple is very serious because bees travel up to five kilometres, so these genes will end up pollinating other apple orchards and GMO apple seeds could end up anywhere."

Another major concern centres on Roundup Ready alfalfa, says Lisa Mumm, owner of organic company Mumm's Sprouting Seeds in Parkside, Saskatchewan. Despite years of opposition from alfalfa farmers south of the border, the U.S. approved sale of the biotech alfalfa



Arjan Stephens of Nature's Path Foods says consumers want to know if their food has been genetically modified.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

**"Polls over the years have shown that Canadians haven't wavered in their desire for GMO labels, with at least 80 per cent in support. And more and more, Canadians are standing up for their right to know what's in their food, including whether it has been genetically engineered."**

**Lisa Mumm**  
is owner of  
Mumm's Sprouting Seeds

(resistant to weed-killer Roundup) in 2011. Only one regulatory step remains before Canadian approval is granted.

"Both organic and conventional farmers oppose approval," says Ms. Mumm. "Farmers that

use chemicals don't want it because there is no need to use Roundup to grow healthy alfalfa plants. Not only will pollination by bees inevitably contaminate organic alfalfa but the whole organic food system will be af-

fected. Organic farmers all use alfalfa to build soil health and organic animal producers rely heavily on organic alfalfa as feed."

Despite these threats, both these organic food producers are optimistic that positive change is on the horizon, thanks in part to California's Proposition 37. This ballot question will ask state voters on November 6 to say yes or no to mandatory labelling of genetically engineered food, a requirement found in many other nations, including all members of the European Union.

"Victory for the California ballot initiative has the potential to change the way food is marketed and sold across North America," says Mr. Stephens. "This will put pressure on other U.S. states and on our government because Canadians will not want to be one of the few developed countries not requiring GMO labelling."

Lisa Mumm agrees. "Polls over the years have shown that Canadians haven't wavered in their desire for GMO labels, with at least 80 per cent in support. And more and more, Canadians are standing up for their right to know what's in their food, including whether it has been genetically engineered."

## EATING ORGANIC

## Consumers show a taste for organic apples

**A**fter first appearing in the grocery aisle two decades ago, the Ambrosia has become the new favourite apple of many consumers in Canada and abroad.

"Juicy, crunchy, sweet and resistant to browning – there are many reasons why apple growers Wilfrid and Sally Mennell named their

apple Ambrosia after the food of the gods," says Linda Edwards, spokesperson for the Ambrosia Organic Growers.

Sales have climbed steadily in Canada over the past 10 years, and the apples are also exported to the U.S. and Asia. In Vietnam, Edwards says, Ambrosias are prized as gifts that are carved up

and shared after dinner.

She states that choosing organic apples is a healthier choice for both people and the environment. "Organic apples have a smaller environmental and chemical footprint. When you choose a certified organic apple you don't need to worry about pesticides on your fruit or in the soil."

This report was produced by RandallAnthony Communications Inc. ([www.randallanthony.com](http://www.randallanthony.com)) in conjunction with the advertising department of The Globe and Mail. Richard Deacon, National Business Development Manager, [rdeacon@globeandmail.com](mailto:rdeacon@globeandmail.com).

Organic foods benefit even the greenest thumb.

**Healthy Canadians understand the advantages of organic foods.**

In fact, Canadians bite into \$2.5 billion worth of organic food annually, supporting nearly 4000 certified organic producers in Canada. The Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA) works collaboratively with partner associations to raise awareness and educate Canadians about the benefits of organics to their healthy lifestyles. [Learn more at chfa.ca.](http://chfa.ca)

**chfa**  
TM  
Voice of the Natural Health Industry  
La voix de l'industrie de la santé naturelle