

REPORT  
1997 March 24

CITY OF BURNABY  
ENVIRONMENT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS

Re: Regulations Pertaining to Organic Foods in British Columbia

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** this report be received for information.

REPORT

The Environment and Waste Management Committee, at its meeting held on 1997 March 11, received and adopted the attached staff report summarizing provincial regulations pertaining to the organic certification of foods.

Arising from discussion, the Committee requested that a letter be forwarded to the provincial government expressing support for regulations regarding certification of foods as organic. The Committee also requested that a letter be forwarded to Agriculture Canada requesting that serious consideration be given to national standards for organic foods.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor L. Rankin  
Chair

Councillor D. Johnston  
Member

Councillor D. Lawson  
Member

: COPY - CITY MANAGER  
- DIR. PLNG. & BLDG.  
- ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
ENVIRONMENT & WASTE  
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

1997 MARCH 06

OUR FILE: 11.001

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**SUBJECT:** REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO ORGANIC FOODS IN BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

**PURPOSE:** To provide information to the Committee regarding the certification of foods as organic in British Columbia.

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** this report be received for information.

**R E P O R T**

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of 1996 October 08, the Environment and Waste Management Committee received a letter from Mr. Doug Porter regarding Bill C-62 and opposition to the introduction of R-genetically altered foods. Arising from the discussion, the Committee requested information on the requirements pertaining to the certification of foods as organic in British Columbia. This report addresses that request.

**2.0 REGULATIONS IN CONTEXT**

British Columbia is currently the only province which provides certification of foods as organic through the "British Columbia Certified Organic Production Operation Policies and Farm Management Standards" made pursuant to the British Columbia Organic Agricultural Products Certification Regulation under the Food Choice and Disclosure Act of British Columbia. Quebec is in the process of implementing regulations pertaining to organic foods, and federal standards are currently being considered.

The British Columbia regulations were introduced in 1993. Prior to this, bio-regional boards, comprised of local organic producers, provided "certification" according to locally defined standards. These bio-regional boards approached the provincial government in the mid-1980s requesting coordination and provincial-wide standards and certification.

As a result, the regulations were introduced and the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC) was formed as the administering agency. The COABC is composed of representatives from all regional certifying member agencies, previously the bio-regional boards. It is the responsibility of the member certifying agencies to certify local producers, processors and handlers of organic foods to the standards set forth in the "British Columbia Certified Organic Production Operation Policies and Farm Management Standards." Only producers which have undergone this certification process are permitted to use the phrase and label "British Columbia Certified Organic."

### **3.0 BRITISH COLUMBIA REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO THE ORGANIC CERTIFICATION OF FOODS**

To obtain organic certification, a producer must demonstrate that the farm has been maintained organically for a minimum of three years. Accurate and detailed records of all farm inputs are necessary to obtain and maintain certification, as are regular inspections of the farm, and water and soil sample tests. Lands or products in a transitional stage are considered to be "Under Review." There are no rights to label products available under this category.

A 25 foot (8 metre) buffer zone is required to border land in organic production to prevent contamination from adjacent activities where necessary. Crops produced in the buffer zone must be marketed as conventionally grown products.

The regulations and standards apply to all aspects of production. Documentation of every practice and farm input material used is critical for certification, with standards in place for and documentation required on:

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|--|---|
| ▶ soil management                                    | ▶ insect control  |
| ▶ tillage  | ▶ disease control   |
| ▶ manure management                                  | ▶ greenhouse production   |
| ▶ soil amendments, fertilizers, and growth promoters | ▶ pre- and post-harvest handling  |
| ▶ crop rotation                                      | ▶ livestock production (beef, swine, sheep, goats, game and exotic animals) |
| ▶ plant propagation                                  | ▶ poultry and fowl production   |
| ▶ irrigation practices                               |   |
| ▶ weed control                                       |   |

The regulations identify required, allowed, regulated and prohibited practices and farm input materials which must be adhered to in order to obtain organic certification.

While the certifying member agencies are responsible for monitoring and implementing the regulations, there are a number of areas which are left up to the discretion of the certifying member agency to determine on a case by case basis. For example, the lists of farm input

materials identified in the regulations is not exhaustive, and farm input materials which are not listed must be ruled on by the certifying member agency. This reflects the ever-changing market of agricultural products and new information about existing products. Certifying member agencies are also responsible for setting out local standards for area-specific practices such as tillage, which must be appropriate to bio-regional limitations.

As such, certifying member agencies have some autonomy and discretion in the implementation of the regulations. This permits the flexibility necessary for organic production, which, by definition, will vary according to crop and growing conditions. However, the COABC provides for regular audits of its certifying member agencies to ensure implementation and compliance of certification standards is maintained.

#### 4.0 REGULATIONS UNDER REVIEW

The regulations are currently undergoing revision with an aim to:


- ▶ streamline the certification process;
- ▶ broaden the auditing committee to include consumer and processing representatives; and
- ▶ introduce standards for dairy production, mushroom cultivation, wine processing and the processing of foods.

The review of the regulations has involved consumer representatives, environmental advocates, and industry representatives. It is anticipated that the draft regulations will be finalized by April 1997.

The regulations are reviewed on an annual basis and revised as necessary. Input is accepted at any time, and all input is considered during the annual review.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSION

The British Columbia regulations pertaining to the certification of foods as organic have been summarized. This is for the information of the Committee.

  
D.G. Stenson, Director  
for PLANNING AND BUILDING

KSF  
cc. Chief Environmental Health Officer