

4. Why is an office of organic agriculture and gardening needed

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1. Organic agriculture reduces health risk to all citizens

Risk to health from pesticides has remained the same since 1970

Chemical poisoning is currently part of the cost of doing business for many farmers and their families. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15) It does not have to be so.

Because pesticide use is still increasing and the aggregate public health hazards from pesticides have not decreased since 1970 while the costs of pesticide regulation consistently increase, the only way to decrease both risks and costs is by an aggressive government policy of reduction in pesticide use, and development of alternatives to chemical pesticides. (7)

Organic agriculture does not use pesticides. It thus reduces direct and indirect exposures and provides local sources of food which have not had pesticides applied to them. Promoting organic gardening will help reduce pesticide around homes and yards where children are at high risk of exposure.

2. An office of organic agriculture will help the industry grow

It would give manufacturers and stores a message that Saskatchewan is open for business in the organic field.

Products already registered in Canada could come west because registrants and stores would see a market

Loblaws made the commitment to only handle chemical-free pesticides by 2003. Their Regina stores have had very few products, while their Eastern stores carry a large number. In 2004, they hired the World Wildlife Fund to produce a brochure (12) to be handed out at all their retail outlets in Eastern Canada. Why don't these initiatives come west of the Ontario border? A commitment by the Saskatchewan government to organics would speed up the rate at which products available in Eastern Canada would be available on store shelves here.

It would provide a potential market for organic and less toxic products registered elsewhere to be licensed in Canada.

Many pesticides were or still are not registered in Canada because their manufacturers do not think it is worth the cost of licensing them here. Saskatchewan uses 33-36% of all pesticides in Canada. It may very well be a large incentive for several lower risks products to be registered. An example is *Bacillus sphaericus*, a bacterium similar to *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (*Bti*) used as a larvicide for mosquito control. It has the advantage of providing control in types of water where *Bti* is not as effective. Some people in

the field have said that the producing companies had not bothered for a long time registering it in Canada because the market was perceived as being too small.

An office of organic agriculture and gardening would be a center to collect the research currently done, the information currently available, and distribute it to the public, as well as government staff and extension people. By having the information in hand, it could also identify priority research needs.

An office of Organic Agriculture and Gardening would be a visible way of promoting the Saskatchewan government's efforts in this field.

3. Organic farming is environmentally and economically sustainable

Some organic farmers have decided to farm organically for ideological reasons. Many have taken it up for health reasons, usually after getting sick from pesticides. Many others have chosen to opt into certified organic farming because of financial reasons. They were familiar with regular farming and its economic burden of huge economic outlay early in the season and judged, accurately, that organic farming is the way to go to make money. Several studies have shown this to be accurate.

A move towards organics would allow money to remain in the farmer's hands, where it belongs, instead of being siphoned off to multi-nationals.

An Office of Organic Agriculture and Gardening would show organics as a politically and economically acceptable choice.

4. The promotion of organics may be healing to the farm family and the agricultural community

In 1998, Saskatoon hosted the *Rural Health and Safety in a Changing World* international symposium. The Saskatchewan PECOS multidisciplinary project was an important part of this symposium. One of the researchers worked on the increase in marital violence and abuse in rural communities. Although she did not ask the reasons for the fighting, women are usually much more concerned about health, especially their children's. This difference may fuel arguments about money, especially when the large cost of chemicals and the poor financial return of chemical agriculture are taken into consideration. This theory has some support in the community.

Offering farm families an option to make ends meet while getting rid of, or reduce, chemicals in the process is a winning combination. It gives them a way out of the economic trap they see themselves in now.

Conclusion

An Office of Organic Agriculture and Gardening would recognize the environmental and economical sustainability of organic farming. It would help increase the availability of the number of products compatible with organic agriculture. It would heal the agricultural community by offering an option to the current high-input high cost agriculture and the bad economic situation it creates.

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