

**Organic Farming: An Institutional Ethnography**

by

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### **Abstract**

This thesis investigates challenges to promoting socially just, locally focused agriculture faced by the organic certification program that now regulates organic farming in British Columbia. This inquiry into how organic certification works is conducted as an institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography is the methodological foundation of Dorothy Smith's feminist sociology for people. For the institutional ethnographer, ordinary daily activity is the site for investigation of social organization. Small scale organic farmers who are committed to sustainable, socially and ecologically just agriculture offer a critical standpoint from which to explicate extra-local text mediated ruling relations. This inquiry draws on data from open-ended interviews with farmers and an independent organic certification inspector. From these accounts I begin to address how it is that BC's organic farming certification program actually enters into and reconstitutes the everyday work of farmers and inspectors. From

my findings I argue that corporate interests and a focus on global free trade in organic produce and products increasingly guide the institutional structure of organic certification programs. This in turn moves organic farming out of local, farmer control.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis documents a journey from my sociological interest in organic farming to my discovery of Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography, a method that shaped the course of this exploration and analysis of certified organic farming on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Institutional ethnography is the foundation for Smith's feminist sociology for people, a Marxian method that focuses on human activity as socially organized. For the institutional ethnographer ordinary daily activity of people becomes the site for investigation of social organization, understood as purposeful coordination of embodied experience through increasing textually mediated forms (Smith, 1987). In this paper, small-scale organic farmers who are committed to sustainable, socially and ecologically just agriculture form a critical standpoint from which personal accounts of their activity are used to explicate extra-local coordination of everyday life.

I draw here on data from six open-ended interviews. The first, with John,<sup>1</sup> a small scale certified organic farmer, predates my analytic shift to institutional ethnography and evidences the necessity of this shift. The remaining four interviews consist of two follow-up meetings with John; an interview with Karen who is also a small scale certified organic farmer on Vancouver Island; and two interviews with Mack, a verification officer whose work is integral to BC's organic certification program. From these accounts I begin to address how it is that this institution for organic certification enters into and reconstitutes the everyday work of people.

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<sup>1</sup> All names and identifying details have been altered in accordance with participant confidentiality agreements.

## **Small Farmers, Big Business and Institutional Ethnography**

It was sunny but cool. The ground was wet as it always is here on our island in December, but otherwise it was the sort of day we West Coasters take for granted mid-winter when most of Canada is knee-deep in snow. My car splashed through deep potholes on its climb up the driveway to the farmhouse. There I would interview John, a small scale organic farmer whose egg production practices – along with those of all small scale organic egg producers in the province - violated BC Egg Marketing Board regulations at that time (November 2004) and put his 500 bird flock at risk of seizure. As I drew closer, and stopped to wait for a gathering of hens busy preening and scratching in the mud of the drive, I began to mull over the title of my paper, pre-fixed due to an early call for abstracts. ‘Hiding Hens and Dodging the Chicken Police: Realities of Organic Egg Farming on the Saanich Peninsula’ (Wagner, 2005) was to be presented in snowy Guelph Ontario at the Organic Farming Conference in January; yet despite the ominous risks they posed to John’s farm, highly visible free-range birds were clucking amok all over the grounds of this illegal operation.

This interview with John was the first of three that contributed to this thesis exploring such “realities” associated with ‘organic’ farming – a method of food production derived from a social movement critical of perceived harms of ‘conventional’ agriculture and committed to generating alternative farming practices. Conventional agriculture refers to big business food production that largely came into being following World War II when leftover chemicals of war made their way onto fields as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. The conventional food industry has come to be ‘agribusiness’ - food production and distribution that is corporatized, heavily standardized in practice,

and easily rationalized within our current globalizing, capitalist system. Agribusiness involves advanced technology and mass production, externalized environmental costs, extended corporate control over the world's food supply through multiple market entry points, vertical and horizontal corporate integration, and global initiatives (Harper & LeBeau, 2003). Within this system, food is produced and distributed well beyond its point of origin, and season and locality are disconnected from food in the commodity form. Grassroots organic food movements emerged in response to significant ecological costs and animal suffering associated with conventional food (Robbins, 1987; McMahon, 2002); and to the unjust social relations that the industry relies on, which remain largely invisible to a detached Western consumer (McMahon, 2004).

Earlier feminist sociological research on organic farmers, in particular that of Martha McMahon (2001; 2002; 2004) and Jennifer Sumner (2003), uses qualitative interview data to explore alternative farming practices. According to such research, small scale organic farmers can farm in opposition to conventional, patriarchal and corporatized food systems (McMahon, 2001: 37) and are variously and contextually motivated by commitments, for example, to ecological sustainability, animal rights, food localization, community development and social justice (Sumner, 2003). Indeed, my first interview with John fit such findings. Astounded by environmental degradation he witnessed during previous employment and keen on providing healthy food and a healthy lifestyle for his growing family, John moved to Vancouver Island over twenty years ago to begin farming organically and distributing food locally. He eloquently describes the biodiversity system that his organic farm has become:

John: All our eggs are basically spoken for all the time. Restaurants, an organic bakery, some box programs, farm gate. But we don't want to really expand because it would upset the balance I think, of the farm. We've got laying birds, and we do meat chickens and pigs as well. We collect their litter and make compost out of it for, for all our vegetables. We have 12 varieties of apples, we grow a lot of strawberries and of course we grow salad greens for... local grocery stores ... We grow spinach, kale, peas and beans, a variety of different beans we grow, from broad beans to dried beans and two or three varieties of peas, there's potatoes and carrots and onions and you name it. Broccoli, cauliflower. If we can eat it we try and grow it.

Certainly, along with the farming community he speaks highly of, John farms in opposition to industrial 'conventional' agriculture. His variety of farming strives toward self-reliance and an image of what he believes a farm should be. He works to achieve a way of life he desires for himself and his family, a lifestyle that would be unattainable through conventional agricultural practices:

John: An average organic farm might have fifty to one hundred fifty chickens because it's a farm, not a mono-crop. You go drive through the Fraser Valley. You'll see chicken farms, lots of them. They're buildings in fields. You won't see an animal. No people! You might see a pickup parked outside or you might see the guy if he steps out for a smoke. Mostly, you won't see a living, moving thing. Call it industry, factory. They're not farming in any sense of the word.

Across the country where she was attending university, like John, participant Karen became interested in organic farming because of a desire for a particular kind of lifestyle. She describes her motivations that led her to organic farming on Vancouver Island as follows:

Karen: I wanted a way of life that was away from the dominant stream. I just wasn't – well now I am a business person – but I guess I had strong environmental ethics and I wanted to live life without hurting the planet. I

wanted to have a small footprint, I wanted to live outside, I wanted to live alternatively, so I guess I felt like with growing my own food - and I had been involved in a little bit of activism and stuff – so I felt that growing my own food was the way to be free of corporate stuff.

Karen's interest in growing her own food turned her toward organic farming, and eventually prompted a move from East to West to carry out an organic farm apprenticeship. Ten years later Karen runs her own certified organic farm, specifically as a grower on a small plot of rented land. Thinking back on my own experiences working and schmoozing on local organic farms, and helping my parents grow fruit and vegetables on their own one acre plot, the farms I am familiar with are of the size and scale of Karen's, and fit wholly with John's notion of farming in 'every sense' of the word. The chickens that gather at my car door each time I arrive at John's farm, cocking their small heads and vocalizing inquisitively, roam outdoors where they contribute to a farm lifestyle and uphold John's personal convictions regarding animal welfare and sustainable food. Yet, in defiance of Marketing Board regulations that forbade John's flock of over 99 birds without registered quota, the free roaming hens served to uphold John's compliance with institutionalized BC Organic Standards.

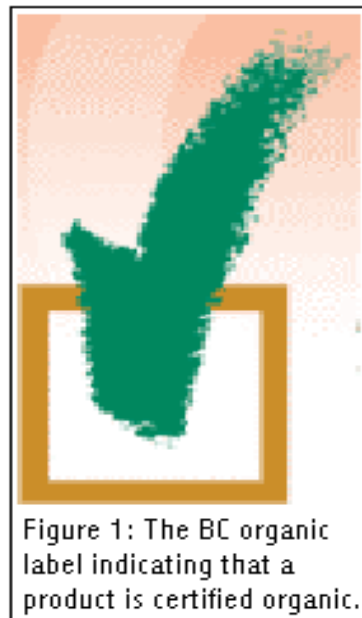
Self-conscious of their critique of conventional agribusiness production and distribution, organic farming movements have collectively generated alternative programs for agriculture, delineating standards for farming concerned primarily with ecological sustainability, animal welfare and social justice. Sustainable and just food production was originally conceived as small scale organic farming; food thoughtfully

and considerably produced without chemicals to be sold locally at fair prices for farmers (Sligh, 2002). The farming standards that emerged in accordance with the alternative values of grassroots initiators were viewed, originally, as an educational tool for farmers and a symbol of their shared alternative ethical and ecological commitments (Michelsen, 2001). As food scares, and (less so) environmental atrocities associated with conventional food were publicized through mass media and shared over the internet, demand for organic grew into “one of the major market trends of our time” (Allen and Kovach, 2000: 221). With this growth, increasingly the definition of organic farming is regulated by national governments. The rise of institutionalised organic farming – that is State ratified programs for producing certified organic foodstuffs – indicates that aspects of the organic movement have altered locations from marginalized or alternative to socially and economically integrated (Kaltoft, 2001). For example the EU has backed formalized and legally binding organic standards since 1991 (Lampkin, 1994). On December 21, 2000 the USA issued federally binding organic standards - the American National Organic Program (NOP) - mandatory in that all organic producers selling in excess of \$5000 per year must be certified by law or risk civil penalties (Johnston, 2005: 3). Federally institutionalised organic standards in Canada, too, have been created, and harmonize nicely with the American program. Legally, the Canadian national organic program (NOP) comes into effect as of December 2008 (COABC, 2007). Until then, individual provinces uphold slightly varying definitions of organic, and programs for certified organic food production (COABC, 2007).

Internationally institutionalized organic standards have most recently been standardized. Perhaps most prominently are those delineated by The United Nations

Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex, 2007). The Codex organic standard “unifies the global market and promotes trade by requiring that its 160 member countries accept imports certified as organic according to Codex guidelines, irrespective of national regulations” (Raynolds, 2004: 730). Codex standards emphasize “technical norms and industrial verification procedures,” and disengage with the movement’s “civic and domestic principles,” as Raynolds explains (730). They are the accepted version of standards most recently promoted by the Organic Trade Association (OTA), a widely held membership-based association of organic farmers that “focuses on the organic business community in North America” with a “mission to promote and protect the growth of organic trade to benefit the environment, farmers, the public and the economy” (OTA, 2007). Yet the idea that internationally harmonized standards “benefit” organic farmers is contested. Small scale farmers who do not engage in international trade tend to see efforts such as the OTA’s as a “push for degraded and gutted standards” that only serves a corporate need “to qualify [organic foodstuffs] for international trade under WTO rules...in order to increase the amount of trade they can do with the Codex-compliant world” (Laibow, 2007). The OTA in turn describes itself as “a proud member of The International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM)” (OTA, 2007), that is the worldwide umbrella organization for the organic movement that unites more than 750 organic farming member organizations in 108 countries (IFOAM, 2007). IFOAM is the most widely publicized and recognised international voice for organic farming. Yet while many organic farmers have voiced concern over international harmonization of organic standards for trade purposes, claiming the shift opposes both their personal interests and the integrity of organic

farming (Guthman, 2004a; Ikerd, 2007), current IFOAM president Gunnar Rundgren has declared an embrace of internationally ratified organic standards specifically “as a means to facilitate the expansion of organic produce in global trade” (Rundgren, 2003: 31).



The standards that currently guide organic farming in BC have been in place since 1994 (COABC, 2007). They are an annually revised list of particular farming practices and inputs deemed ‘allowed,’ ‘disallowed,’ ‘mandatory’ or ‘regulated’ for purposes of certification. Organic certification requires a farmer to meet these provincially recognized, codified standards. While there is still much debate about the components of certification - with many arguing that the focus should be shifted instead to localization of production and distribution - in many ways the Certified Organic Association of BC’s certification program for organic food production has come to define organic farming for the province. Farmers are registered with the Certified Organic Association of BC (COABC), an umbrella organization that describes organic

quite typically as “an agricultural production system that promotes and enhances biological diversity... based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony” (COABC, 2005). The COABC produces and updates its standards meant to coincide with this definition and co-ordinates organic certification by recognizing 13 various accrediting or certifying bodies within the province, such as the Island Organic Producers Association (IOPA) to which both John and Karen belong. These smaller, regionally specific associations of farmers hire independent third-party inspectors or verification officers to conduct annual farm inspections. The verification officers, such as participant Mack, are trained to do farm inspections and audits through a mandatory course organized by the Independent Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA). Reports from the verification officers’ inspections are used to determine whether the work of organic farmers under jurisdiction complies with the applicable organic standards. Those certified are able to sell organic foodstuffs labelled with the BC certified organic check mark (Figure 1) and in turn, retain premium prices for their goods.

Recent research on organic farming in California shows, however, that the price premiums associated with organic certification programs are vulnerable because they are linked to scarcity of certified organic land, and in turn, availability of certified organic produce and products. Specifically, in supporting strict organic standards that require three years to bring land into certified organic production, established organic farmers back barriers to market entry that can limit their competition and earn them access to monopoly rents for their niche products (Guthman, 2004b). Yet as organic standards increasingly move out of the immediate control of farmers, regions and even

countries, to become internationally harmonized documents heavily influenced by trade agendas, new (multinational corporate) entry into the market is facilitated. Markets in some regions, and in particular in California, have begun or are beginning to flood with this particular variety of ‘corporate’ organic goods. Thus market share - rather than premium – starts to become the name of the game (Guthman, 2004b). In such circumstances organic farming can become less and less economically viable for small scale farmers.

The paradox is that although the organic movement was led by small scale farmers creating an alternative agriculture, the moniker ‘organic’ has now generally become associated with the institutionalized programs for certified organic farming that are increasingly centrally organized. When thinking of grassroots ambitions for sustainable food systems it is no longer appropriate to speak of a homogenous organic farming movement. Despite the irony that many organic farmers, like Karen, were drawn to growing food organically as “the way to be free of corporate stuff,” corporate entry into the organic market whether welcomed or scorned, has become a reality. Multinational food giants such as General Mills thrive within the organic sector having branded popular certified organic products such as Muir Glen and Cascadian Farms. Organic brands are marketed and distributed in the same consolidated retail sector as conventional brands, and are increasingly produced by existing conventional suppliers who ‘convert’ all or part of their operations to comply with organic standards for short term contracts with such corporations (Guthman, 2003). Organic certification is imperative for these large scale corporate sponsored growers. Their use of the conventional food distribution system (as opposed to direct sales, local markets, or

small scale farm box programs) means that the third party verified organic label is necessitated to establish consumer trust (Guthman 2004a).

Consequently some small scale agro ecological movement initiators are now trying to define themselves in opposition to corporate organics. This new initiative comes from small scale farmers who are dedicated to local control over food production and distribution based on face-to-face trust. Often these are farmers who initially endorsed organic certification programs but are dismayed by their evolution. As geographer Julie Guthman (2004a) explains in reference to her study of organic farmers in California:

Some [small scale farmers who I interviewed] felt the costs and hassle of certification to be unequal to the benefits; they did not like the idea of being charged to use the word *organic*, and although many actually followed CCOF guidelines, they objected to supporting a certification bureaucracy for sales that were based on trust. A few characterized certification as a “parasite industry” on growers and claimed they would leave the organic rubric if certification became required under the federal rule. Paradoxically, these... growers liked high standards but objected to State intervention (145).

Such farmers are typically associated with many of the broadly termed ‘alternative agrifood initiatives’ and express what many consider to be the original concerns of grassroots organic farming movements. Their goals include biodiversity farming without chemicals, localization of production and distribution, process rather than input oriented farming programs, and varying emphasis on interconnected goals of protecting the environment, workers, animals and health. Yet like food, people, ideas, ideals, movements and actions all grow in particularities of time and space. Over the past three decades, while the organic market was emerging and expanding and its certification

programs were being institutionalized, the operation of a new global capitalist agenda that has come to be known as neoliberalism was taking shape and taking off. Tellingly the neoliberal agenda has provided the climate for growth of organic farming programs, with a hand in shaping the development of the movement and market and the structure of its verification institution. While non-certified 'organic' farmers in BC may continue to farm in ways they personally describe as organic, under provincial law they may only label their product 'organic' if they become certified and maintain their certification status. Avenues for sale of non-certified organic produce and products are diminishing: the largest farmers' market on Vancouver Island demands certification (Moss Street), the largest organic box distribution program is exclusively certified organic (Small Potatoes Urban Delivery), and provincially, all grocery store sales of organic produce require certification. Farmers Karen and John both certify their farms and feel this is the only option they have for their farming to be economically viable. Interestingly however, they both describe the land, and not the farmer, as the object of certification.

Karen explains as follows:

Katie: Now when you get certified organic, is it certifying you or the land you work on, or...

Karen: The land. It's the land that is certified.

Katie: So then what would happen if you ran out of a contract with [the owners of your land], or they decided to sell or something?

Karen: Yeah we have a ten year lease. Well it was five years, then it was renewed, and I guess I'm now up for another renewal. They're happy about it though I think because for tax purposes they get a lot of write-offs for the farm being there. And I think they like it there, it's character. But it would be devastating to lose.

As a certified organic tenant farmer Karen invests money and time into land she does not hold the title of, a potentially precarious position for her livelihood as a certified organic farmer. She laments, “I think that it would be nice to own my own land, it would be nice to not be dependent.” Yet purchasing land is not a financial possibility for her at this time, and choosing not to certify her rented land is also not an option.

Karen explains as follows:

Karen: When you're not certified all of a sudden you are competing on the world market, like your spinach is no different than anyone's and I would say the price is maybe less than half. Some people that are good marketers, then they maybe are able to overcome that, but basically if you don't have your certification you're really on your own. For me it does a whole lot.

The loss of price premiums that would occur if Karen were not certified would be devastating to her business. It would put her product in competition with the cheaper conventional product while making the product less interesting to the high-end restaurants she sells to, in turn making her small-scale labour intensive farming practices not only unprofitable but impossible to maintain. Furthermore, without certification Karen and John would lose most of their customer base. The restaurants, markets, grocery stores, bakeries and box programs that buy from Karen or John respectively do so not simply because the product they offer is locally produced, but because the product is certified organic. Karen explains:

Katie: So would there be a difference if you weren't certified organic in a situation like this – are your restaurant and box customers specifically looking for certified organic produce?

Karen: Yes I think so. We have a policy that we don't buy any produce that isn't certified. And most of our chefs put it on the menu that they're buying

local organic, I think that gives them a lot of mileage. For our customers, our home delivery customers, I think it's really important because they just like the idea that it's organic.

While current conditions make organic certification imperative for Karen and John, I began my research with a personal interest in the kind of farming they do and not its official certified organic label. Their variety of farming coincides with my personal experiences with and desires for 'organic.' I truly believe small scale, localized, biodiversity farming to be the most ecologically sustainable and socially just food production method. Yet I am increasingly interested in the institutionalization of organic farming programs and the effects of transporting this alternative movement into the mainstream. As a consumer in the grocery store I notice the BC certified organic label and use it to inform my purchases. Yet I wonder about the farms behind this label. How similar to or different from a vision of sustainable agriculture are they? What is the process behind the check mark? How does certification affect organic farmers?

Shortly following my decision to study organic farming, and my first interview with John, I became acquainted with Dorothy Smith's method of sociological inquiry. That is, her alternative sociology for women, for people. Smith argues for a feminist sociology that begins from the standpoint of women as actors in their daily lives rather than from within mainstream institutionalized sociology (Smith, 1987, 1990b). While many feminist sociological methods of inquiry (such as the aforementioned qualitative research on organic farming) similarly begin with everyday life, for Smith such methods are all too often insufficient. Like 'traditional' ethnomethodology, they continue to objectify that which they study and/or do not go beyond the local to target broader social relations and the textual mediation that co-ordinates daily/nightly life in our

current time of advanced capitalism in late modernity (Grahame, 1998).

Standardized texts, increasingly computerized, have become the medium through which people's activities are coordinated across local sites (Smith, 2001). Smith argues that texts - identified as "forms, instructions, rules, rule-books, memos, procedural manuals, funding applications, statistical analyses, libraries, journals, and many many more" - are integral to people's daily lives and serve to mediate, regulate and authorize activity (Smith, 2001: 173). The unique property of texts is their materially replicable form that allows for standardization - for the appearance of "the same set of words, numbers or images in multiple local sites" (2001: 160). Textual mediation is integral to contemporary forms of social organization, in particular to institutional organization that holds the remarkable capacity to organize people's work across space and independent of time, to achieve objectives that are far-reaching in their consequences. Smith uses the term 'ruling relations' to encompass "the great complex of objectified and extra-local relations coordinating people's activities across multiple local sites, known from various theoretical positions as discourse, bureaucracy, large-scale or formal organization, the 'State,' institutions in general, and so on" (2001: 161). Investigation of ruling relations, and thus textually coordinated activity, is possible from the standpoint of particular embodied experience, as Smith (1999) explains:

The standpoint of women locates us in bodily sites, local, actual, particular; it problematizes, therefore, the co-ordination of people's activities as social relations organized outside local historical settings, connecting people in modes that do not depend on particularized relationships between people. The ruling relations are of this kind, coordinating the activities of people in the local sites of their bodily being into relations operating independently of person, place and time (75).

Contemporary modernity - our dynamic and multidimensional age of capitalist mass production and consumption, information and communication (Giddens, 1990) - can largely be characterized by its reliance on relations as Smith describes them, abstracted from real time and place and far-reaching in their consequences. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990) known for his comprehensive theory of contemporary modernity, describes 'time-space distancing' as fundamental to the institutionalized 'disembedding' of social and economic relations. Disembedding is "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (1990: 21). Where 'place' refers to local sites of bodily being, increasingly in contemporary modernity these actual locales are altered in ungrounded 'space' by 'absent' others (19). And while social interaction refers to co-presence, it is the extrapolated social relations of modernity that are the means for social organization. In a Marxist sense these social relations must be understood as dialectical and not immutable - people structure relations and are structured by them (Giddens, 1984: 89). Yet largely neglected by Giddens is Smith's emphasis on texts. Importantly, Smith insists that texts are the concrete means, present in the local, through which human activity is coordinated beyond immediate time and place. It is textual mediation that allows for social organization through the disembedded relations of contemporary modern institutions. In offering a method to examine how activity is coordinated across local sites, Smith problematizes abstracted relations and time and space distancing. Importantly, she offers a method to examine precisely how ruling power and control is exerted and executed through social relations; thus, how 'absent' others alter actual locales through ungrounded space (Giddens, 1990: 19).

Although sociology theory seminars tend to focus a student on Giddens, it was learning Smith's institutional ethnography that fundamentally altered the course of the research I began in December of 2004. I seek here not to explain the behaviour of a sample of farmers based on an operationalized understanding of their farming practices. Rather, I aim to explicate the relations they partake in, which in turn organize their actual activity. Organic farmers such as John and Karen may indeed be variously motivated by self-reliance, decentralization, community, harmony with nature, diversity, restraint, quality of family life, spirituality and conscious resistance to corporatization, as Sumner (2003) suggests with her research and beautifully illustrates with the voices of women organic farmers. Yet, using Smith's method of inquiry the voices of farmers take on a different role. The woman who always volunteered "to wash dishes when speakers come to the church, so they wouldn't use plastic cups," or the woman who refuses to grow food "that buys into the bastards' model" (Sumner, 2003: 149-150) work within a matrix of textually mediated social relations, regardless of their alternative convictions. Guided by a Marxian ontology Smith explains that social relations are "the actual coordinated activities of actual people... sequences which no one individual completes" (Smith, 1990a: 94). These relations - examinable through a material inquiry into coordinated human activity - are then the target of my sociological research. This can be contrasted with other approaches such as Sumner's that treat the work of organic farmers as a phenomenon to be categorically described. Such sociology tends to explain "a world that has determinate socially constituted features which are the stable production of members... organized in such a way that language and meaning are integral to its production" (Smith, 1990a: 90). Institutional ethnography, rather, is

concerned with exploring how everyday experiences are “articulated to social relations characteristic of this stage of capitalism” (90). Using Smith’s method I want to move beyond a static researchable entity to explore instead a dynamic, contemporary modern world of ongoing actual human activity. I aim to explicate how the work of women and men within their everyday lives actually serves to uphold the social relations that coordinate their embodied realities: to explore the ironic process through which “people’s actual activities as participants give power the relations that ‘overpower’ them” (Smith, 1990a: 161).

Since my initial interview with John I have interviewed Karen and have returned to interview John twice more with my focus redirected to these organic farmers’ work as an embodied site for learning about the institutionalized organization of their farming. With the later interviews I began to unravel how the work of organic farmers is extra-locally coordinated. For example, (as aforementioned) in the context of speaking about motivations for localized biodiversity farming John stated, “If we can eat it we try and grow it” (December 2004). Yet in a later interview, the earlier statement became problematic:

Katie: So are there any other crops that you’ve had to change your ideas on then, or any crops that you would stay away from, being organic?

John: Not from an organic ability perspective. You know, just from the market. We wanted to do blueberries. We thought about that but, you know, in the last four or five years you know all the publicity about blueberries in health magazines and what not, there’s a gazillion of them now, the price is going to go down.

In contrast with the “if we can eat it we try and grow it” ideal, here John begins to identify the external sources that guide his work; he even points to specific texts that

have played a role in shaping his crop choices. Thus, as John's organic farm - on which he wants to grow and sell any food he and his family desires - becomes subject to textually mediated ruling relations his work becomes extra-locally organized and in this example, restricted. Which is not to say that organic farmers do not continue to be motivated in admirable ways important to their subject being; however, shifting my line of inquiry to explore the social relations that accomplish the discourse and processes of food production is imperative. Many institutions – for example, “the market” and corresponding texts such as “health magazines,” along with food safety policies or Marketing Board regulations - enter the lives of organic farmers via extended sequences of texts and activity, rendering the work of an organic farmer ordered and organized through ruling relations. Institutionalization of organic standards becomes yet another researchable entry point into the ruling discourse. Consequently, the very motivations and values that contrast with the dominant patriarchal capitalist paradigm and neoliberal trade agenda are potentially most at risk of becoming inconsequential (Smith, 1990a: 95).

In legitimizing organic farming on an increasingly international level, and thereby institutionalizing organic farming practices, the movement faces potential detachment from its grassroots beginnings; from the very intentions and concerns of farmers such as Karen who were attracted to growing food “away from the dominant stream... to be free of corporate stuff.” Yet the current IFOAM president Gunnar Rundgren, who has made moves toward establishing a globally recognized institution for organic, has declared that “a welcome should be given to multinationals that want to produce and sell organic products” (2003: 31). If institutionalization of organic

standards reflects success of the social movement in gaining social and political legitimization, are there costs that go along with this success? What happens to the alternative values enacted through the work of farmers as organic farming comes to entail a quantitative codified list of standards for regulatory and trade purposes, no longer under grassroots control? What does this mean for an organic commitment to sustainability understood in terms of social and ecological justice? Whose interests are reflected and who benefits as organic moves into the mainstream? Institutional ethnography is an ideal method of inquiry for displaying exactly how an institutionalized program for organic farming enters into and shapes the activity of people throughout the organic certification process: most specifically the lives and work of organic farmers. In explicating the institutional workings of organic farming on the Vancouver Island and sharing my findings with farmers and friends I hope this research will legitimately be *sociology for people* - useful to farmers, activists, concerned consumers, and all who might require a comprehensive map of these relations in order to make informed choices and generate positive change.

As I reconstituted the focus of this inquiry the preening and scratching chickens on the driveway of John's farm became players, and even the sun they basked under became a factor in unravelling the textually mediated ruling relations that coordinate the work of small scale organic farmers. Ratified BC Organic Standards dictate that laying birds must have at least 2.5 square feet of coop space per bird and no less than six hours of access to outdoor to pasture each day, weather permitting (COABC, 2005: Standard 9.3.2). These standards are a regulatory text among many that are read, interpreted and enacted by John and Karen on their farms. Here, using interview accounts of everyday

work and lived experience, I explore the institution for organic certification in BC. I thus delve into the workings of an institution that might otherwise, using a different ontology or method, remain ambiguous as an “entity of object being that upon approach dissolves into the air” (Smith, 2001: 163). To study this institution is to study the local lived experience so as to look at the local as a site of extra-local coordination, upheld and indeed created through the work of people.

### **From Standpoint to a Problematic and Participants Activating Texts**

To do an institutional ethnography it is necessary to begin from the standpoint of women. The standpoint of women must be analytically understood to describe not literal differentiation based on sexed bodies, but rather those being ruled who allow for explication of the ruling relations from their lived experience and embodied consciousness (Smith, 2001). I found such a standpoint in my initial interest in small scale, localized, biodiversity organic farming practiced by those I know and care about. I take up the standpoint of small scale organic farmers whose farming practices not only strive to be exceptionally ecologically sustainable, but involve a radical critique of conventional agriculture and food distribution systems.

Characteristic of contemporary modernity itself, the conventional food system relies on abstracted relations whereby food is lifted out of the real contexts of time and place often serving to hide unjust exploitation of animals and people. These relations associated with conventional food in turn rely on texts essential to “organization of social life across geographic sites” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 32). In buying and eating food produced and distributed within this system, people place trust in abstracted

ruling relations rather than interpersonal exchanges. Thus, when we turn to a small scale operation that is trying to work with the ecological system, trying to localize food production and distribution to make social relations just and known, we are looking at a way of farming guided by an alternative, potentially even anti-modern critique. Farming in this way within the contemporary global capitalist system is predictably challenging and vulnerable to change with institutionalization. Certainly the work of small scale organic farmers is altered as it becomes subject to the social organization characteristic of contemporary modernity, that which is so conducive to conventional industrial food production. From the standpoint of the small scale, locally-oriented, biodiverse organic farmer in BC, from this knower as subject, I investigate social organization, people working in and upholding this institutional process.

To conduct the requisite material investigation it was then necessary to find participants locally engaging with texts. The farmer is situated in actuality, actively interpreting and acting on texts such as BC organic standards that enter the local and mediate reality. Active texts coordinate the work of people who read, interpret and then act, mediated by the text. Each of the texts discussed in this thesis was identified or even activated by the participants during interview. Firstly, I draw here on data from three open-ended interviews with farmer John in which four active texts were identified. These were the COABC Organic Standards (COABC, 2007), a regulating text, read, interpreted and enacted by John; the IOPA certification application, a form filled out annually by John to retain his organic certification (see Appendix A); farm records, created by John and mediated by his interpretation of the standards; and a letter to John from the certifying body, granting conditional certification of his farm. Secondly I draw

on data from Karen's open-ended interview in which she spoke of the organic standards and more prominently, the records she produces for her annual certification inspections. Thirdly I draw on two open-ended interviews with Mack, an organic verification officer. Although Mack does not speak from the viewpoint of a farmer, and thus does not represent the standpoint from which my research unfolds, his work is central to the certification process. His account delineates how it is that texts coordinate the work of people throughout the institutionalized certification process, and in turn how the coordination of a verification officer's work affects the work of an organic farmer. Mack engages with the farmers' applications and records to produce another active text, a report for the certifying body. This report represents the work of the inspected organic farmer and is used to ascertain or verify her certification. Aside from organic standards Mack's account revealed two regulatory texts that mediate his work: the IOIA inspector's manual, and the IOIA inspector's Code of Ethics (see Appendix B), both made available to him during a now mandatory, standardized inspector's training course coordinated by the IOIA.

If there was a defining experience from which I came to my working problematic it was while in Guelph at the aforementioned organic farming conference; the very conference (albeit years earlier) that sparked Karen's interest in organic farming. On the evening following my 'Hiding Hens' presentation I attended a 'vent session' thematically entitled 'Local Organic / Global Solutions'. It was a public forum with hundreds of farmers, organic supporters, academics and interested locals. We gathered to listen and/or put forth opinions to the crowd and questions to a panel of experts. The panel participants ranged from esteemed economics professor John Ikerd

of Missouri, to a large-scale organic grain producer from New York State, to a small scale sheep and biodiversity crop farmer with a small plot on the corner of her brother's farm in Southern Ontario. During the evening the grain farmer was asked to speak about the National Organic Program (NOP), the American nationally ratified organic standards that guide certification of her large-scale grain farm, and indeed, organic certification across the United States. She responded heartily: the national standards had been well received and were exceedingly important. Specifically they established a "level playing field" in that "we're all playing by the same rules now." The immediate reaction to this assertion generated by the small scale, non-certified biodiversity farmer sitting next to me was quiet but fervent: "She would say that." The tension in the moment remains vivid for me. I began to wonder about the organic "playing field," what the 'levelling' of it achieves, who or what drives it and as always, who benefits. How do standardized third-party certified organic farming practices affect the small scale organic biodiversity farmers in proximity to me on Vancouver Island? How do the locally oriented farmers I know cope with playing by the same rules, subject to the same trade agendas, increasingly competing with a growing multitude of organic farmers on national and international levels as 'organic' moves into the mainstream to be marketed and distributed through conventional channels? As my research focus shifted from small scale farmers as objects of study to small scale farmers as a standpoint from which to unravel the institutional process that coordinates their work, a problematic came into being. Thus I query: how is it that the institutionalized program for certified organic farming in BC enters into and reconstitutes the everyday work of small scale, locally oriented organic farmers on Vancouver Island?

### **Organic Certification - Delineating the Process in BC**

When I called John in March to schedule our second interview he happened to be filling out his annual organic certification application “right now” and invited me come see how it was done. Pleased with my good luck but disappointed that I had not called earlier I explained that it would be at least few hours before I could make it to his farm. To my surprise John told me to stop by whenever I could as he would be working on the application all weekend.

When I arrived at the farmhouse John ushered me into the dining room, separated from the kitchen and family eating area that I had interviewed him in previously. A long rectangular table filled the centre of the room extended by three leaves with space enough for six chairs to tuck in comfortably around it. The entire table was strewn with papers. Small and large piles alongside open exercise books, receipt books and ripped loose-leaf with penciled jottings. John gestured to a chair and I sat, cautiously shifting a few papers aside to make room for my tape recorder. I apologised, worried I was putting John’s work out of order. He responded: “That’s just the thing, there is no organization yet.”

John’s certification application is part of the annual certified organic farm verification process. All certified organic farmers in BC receive an application in the mail each year which must be filled out, copied three times and submitted to their certifying body, affiliated with the COABC. In both John and Karen’s case this certifying body is IOPA. John explains the process as follows:

John: In IOPA, [name] is the administrator. He does all the coordinating, like

he sends out all the application forms, he receives them, puts them in order... So normally what the administrator will do is, he'll get like ten farms near each other and hire the same inspector - who's totally independent, a contractor right? To do the ten farms... So the inspector would get one copy. The other two copies would go to the certification committee. So the certification committee volunteer and are elected... there's usually seven or eight of them... then the certification committee would go over the application before [the inspector] gets it. And like if it was a new applicant and there wasn't enough information there, then they wouldn't put [the application] through. They would just send it back to the applicant. And in a lot of cases, they do the same with me, they'll say they can't process it because you're missing this piece of paper. But I try to make sure I've got everything that they say they want! OK, so then the application you know, goes before the committee on which there are seven or eight people. So they go through - not necessarily every person on the committee would go through every single one, because that would be impossible right? There might be 70 or 80 applicants, so for you, one person [it] would take a hell of a long time. So what they do is they divide them up randomly and everybody would get three or four or five or whatever. So you know, they have to say that the application is OK. And then they forward it back to the administrator, and then he'd put them together in the [regional] groupings that I'm saying, to make it easier for the inspector and cheaper. And then he'd pass them on to the inspector, eight or ten or whatever, and he'd take them. The inspector probably reads them before he goes to the farm, then he goes to the farm and he sees what you're doing... I have to walk him around and show him what's going on, and he'll ask about this or that.

Having been an organic farmer for many years now, John competently describes the paper trail that leads to his yearly certification verification. Mack, an “inspector” or formally, verification officer, describes the process similarly, confirming John’s hunch that a verification officer would read the application before arriving at the farm. Mack describes his work as follows:

Mack: So what I do is I look for work with certifying agencies. Certifying agencies decide they want to hire me to go and do inspections for them. So what they do is they send applications to the farms and then it goes back to me, and then I get these applications... and the farmer says OK my name is so and so and my certification number, if they're already certified, is,

you know, 125, and here's a farm map of my farm and there's details on there about all the different crops... So I go through that and I look for possible inconsistencies with the standards and then I call up the farmer and say, you know, I'm going to be your verification officer for this year, and OK, I've got your farm application in front of me, and if I wanted anything clarified I would ask them at that time. And then I'd set up an appointment to go see them... Then I go to their farm, and when I get there... I say, 'Hi my name is [Mack]' and then we kind of go through the application and I ask if there has been any changes since they submitted it, and then I note those down, you know, if there have been or if not...

Katie: What kind of things- changes – are you looking for...

Mack: Ah, like if they've decided instead of putting peas in over here they put in carrots instead, or if they're not going to plant this field and instead are going to leave it fallow. Yeah, things like that. Or they got a new neighbour.

Katie: So you guys need all the details I guess!

Mack: Oh we need to know everything, yeah. Everything that they're doing, like what they're growing and where they're selling it to, if they have labels, everything. So then I'll usually do a farm tour where we walk around the farm and I go and look at the fields, inspect the soil, look at the weed count, look at the crops in the ground, if there are crops in the ground, and I look at the plants, you know and kind of assess their health...

Katie: What do you base all these assessments on?

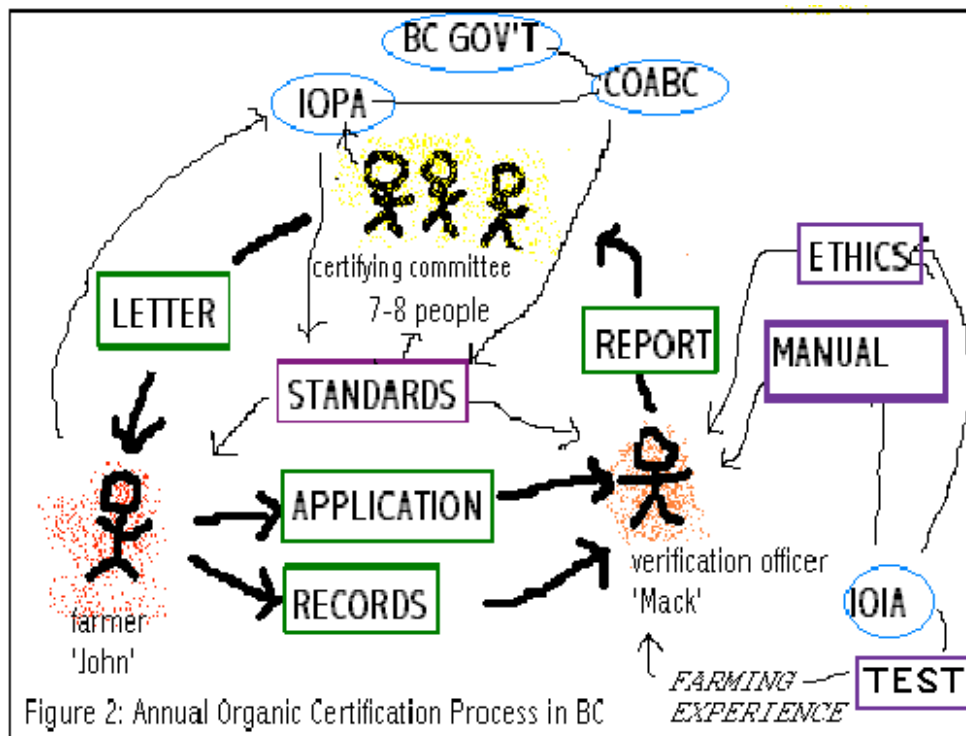
Mack: I base the assessment of the farm on, basically what it said in their applications... then I'm worried about like for example, if there's a field that is like totally bare of weeds, totally devoid of weeds, then its like sort of questionable [both laugh]. Like did they spend the money on weeding that or?... And you always have to keep in mind organic control points, which are places where there could be uh, where there is possibility of the organic integrity being compromised. So things like, illegal inputs, like [inaudible chemical names] and stuff like that... Then I do the exit interview, I say ok, these are my concerns, and they're A, B and C, and here's the standards that they refer to, and the farmer signs that to acknowledge that they have seen my concerns... [Then I write] my report, and I sign it and I send it back to the certifying body. And then the certifying committee of that association can take that report and use it to then decide whether or not they want to certify that operation. Or if they want to put conditions on it.

The application process John and Mack depict is an active text-work sequence. A text (the application) is sent to a reader (the farmer) who interprets and works on the text (fills out the application); which is then sent to another reader (certification committee

member, via administrative officer). This reader in turn interprets and acts on the text (deciding whether it is complete, presumably based on whether the farmer has filled out all categories delineated on the form). Then, if the text is deemed ready to continue on in the process, it is sent (via the administrative officer) to the next reader (the verification officer) who engages with the text and in conjunction with a farm tour, works to produce another active text (the narrative report). Both active texts (the farmer's application and verification officer's report) are then returned to the initiators of the text/reader sequence (the certification body, and in turn, the certification committee). Here the texts are engaged with by readers, and thus activated (in the decision as to whether certification will be granted). The committee then works to produce another text (the letter of certification) which is returned to the original reader (the farmer), read, interpreted and worked on to gain certification for the following year. The entire active sequence - text → reader/work → text → reader/work → text → reader/work → text/text → reader/work → text → reader/work - is mediated by the central regulating text (the BC organic standards), and further mediated by two regulating texts that specifically guide the verification officer's work (the IOIA manual and IOIA code of ethics).

Using John and Mack's accounts I created a diagram of the organic certification process in BC (see Figure 2). 'Institutions' are circled in blue, regulating texts are outlined in purple, and the active texts - created by the farmer, verification officer and members of the certifying committee - are outlined in green. The diagram involves John, thus the certifying body represented is IOPA. Mack, however, could work for any certifying body while Karen could equally stand in for John in the diagram. Because

John – along with the gamut of IOPA farmers - farms under COABC regulations, the regulating text in the centre of the diagram is the BC organic standards. An arrow from IOPA and from COABC indicate that these bodies both acts on the regulating text. BC organic farmers all use COABC organic standards that are regionally respective of their certifying body. John activates the IOPA/COABC BC organic standards, interpreting this regulating text to guide his farming practices. These organic standards also regulate Mack's work when he certifies for the COABC accredited IOPA; however, as an independent organic inspector he could certify farms based on any of the standards used by various organic certification programs, such as for example the American NOP standards. Mack's training as an organic verification officer is also indicated in the diagram. His knowledge of organic farming is tested by the IOIA; the IOIA manual, its code of ethics, and the applicable organic standards are read and interpreted by Mack, and in this way, textually mediate his work.



The BC certified organic standards (labelled ‘standards,’ Figure 2) are central to the diagram as a regulating text that mediates the work of the farmer, verification officer and certification committee. It is the farmer’s responsibility to learn the standards - an ongoing process as they are revised each year – then to enact the standards through farm practices and prove their enactment and complete compliance annually to the verification officer during inspection:

Katie: But [the inspection is] not like a test, I mean there’s not any surprises then are there?

John: Well usually, but the standards get revised every year and admittedly I don’t always read the updates, you know. I usually glance through them and if I see something to do with chickens or strawberries, then I’ll look at it. But if it’s some general thing then sometimes I’ll miss it. But then that’s what they’ll come looking for.

Katie: They look for the newest thing?

John: Yeah and if you’ve picked up on it then you can answer the question, but if you haven’t then you may have gone and done something that – and it won’t necessarily be something that’s prohibited because they don’t generally change it from allowed to prohibited unless they, unless something really happens, and they’ll alert everybody with emails. But they’re not out to catch you in that sense... But of course they always presume that you read your email...

Forms of textual mediation are increasingly computerized. In this case, the Internet allows annual changes to be made to the regulating text, easily interjected into the standardized form and technologically distributed through ungrounded space to the requisite population. Thus John’s work in learning and enacting the organic standards involves not only reading and interpreting the standardized text, but attaining access to the text via the technology that makes updates available to him.

When asked similarly about the “work process involved in keeping up with changing standards” Karen too spoke of the role of personal computers and Internet

access, with particular reference to her use of the certifying body's email listserv:

Karen: [IOPA] runs a listserv so we get this listserv and when issues come up, IOPA takes action, like about the gypsy moth spraying and this issue of fly ash from incinerators that's going into the soil. So we keep up with things that are going on and things that will affect other farmers as well as when new standards come in, or when people have new ideas, like one time it was the source of woodchips. People were putting woodchips on their paths and they were getting mixed in with treated wood chips and they found out so it's usually somebody that figures something out, then writes it to the listserv and then everyone says 'yeah this is an issue and let's make a rule so it doesn't happen to somebody else.'

Katie: So now I'm wondering where you'd be now without the Internet. Like how different it would be. Not just with the marketing but with the contact you all have with each other.

Karen: Yeah I think that in the early years, no one was on the Internet... it was only 199-, and I remember the [annual] meetings were more onerous. We had all these issues from the whole year that would come up, and then 'oh so and so's not here,' but now- well sometimes I hate the listserv because you just want to get through your emails and get on with your day [laughing] - but it really helps us respond in a timely way. Like cool things are when somebody's having a big problem, like if they get blight or some other disease, and they want to respond right away, then you can literally walk out to your field and go aahhh! [exclamation of surprise and horror] walk into your house, type an email [laughing] and then know that by that night you'll have an answer as to what you can do, and you can get to it right away. Before the Internet, I think people would have more of a problem - like if you saw the mill moth going nuts in your green house by the time you got the response from your CB saying 'ok you can spray,' it would be way too late. Because with organic you have to get it the second you see it, or there's no point.

Using the Internet as a communicative tool, members of the certifying body are in contact with farmers on an almost constant basis. Through the listserv, as Karen describes, farmers post problems they encounter and through authoritative written responses, they are guided through dealing with issues as they occur. In using the listserv, farmers interact with texts in a dynamic form; more consistently and with rapid response in an exchange that mimics conversation whilst the properties of the text

(static, physically present and materially replicable) remain. Activity is coordinated from one locale to the other via these texts; yet because emails elicit specific, individually tailored written responses, the textualized coordination of the farmers' work becomes more efficient, site specific and more continually invasive in the everyday world. Emails have become yet another text through which ruling relations coordinate local sites and bring about particular courses of action. These Internet enabled authority-text / reader-actor conversations increasingly replace conversations that might previously have occurred over telephone, in person, or even not at all. Conversation takes on a textual form, physically present in the everyday, replicable and retrievable for reinterpretation. The farmer is "agent" (Smith, 2005) for texts that are both non-responsive or regulatory (such as the organic standards) and for emails - texts with the unique property that, while they themselves do not change in response to the readers' interpretation, they elicit text conversations with institutional authorities, increasing the frequency of interactions with these authorities. As such, the listserv allows farmers access to clarification of their interpretation of texts and specifically tailored instructions on a daily basis.

I have read the COABC organic standards myself, even researching the updates via Internet, yet I cannot comprehend their organizational function – how they coordinate a farmer's work - simply through my own engagement with them. While I may read for content, I am concerned here with process: the text does not stand alone "inert, without impetus or power" (Smith, 1990a: 122) and "cannot be read in detachment from other texts that it addresses, reflects, refers to, presupposes, relies on and so on" (Smith, 2001: 187). The text operates in place and time, actively interpreted

within the local setting in which it is enacted and "necessarily embedded in a complex of texts" (187). John's filled-out application for re-certification plainly depicts this property of the text/reader interchange. It exemplifies John's work in reading, interpreting and acting on texts in the context of a complex of relevant, influential texts. John's own reading of the regulatory text – IOPA's version of the COABC organic standards – and his interpretation of the layout and purpose of the application within the administrative process, guide his work in filling out the form. (See John's written answer to question 'E. Other' of his recertification application, Appendix A):

John: You know they're always asking you for tips in IOPA through this [application]. It actually asks you, now let's see if I can find the section. Yeah here you go. 'Have you successfully used any new techniques or weed, insect pest or disease control. And eh, any information that you'd like to share with other IOPA people'. See I said about the crane fly larvae. They just were eating the heck out of one greenhouse. They just literally destroyed, you know, three of the beds out of six were demolished. And we tried BT, we tried beneficial nematodes and none of it worked. And then we put the chickens in there for a week and they just sort of demolished them. We went up and down with the rotor-tiller and as we turned them over the chickens were following the rotor-tiller and eating the larvae.

Katie: Perfect! And you just thought of doing that yourself? You hadn't read that somewhere?

John: No. Like, I called and talked to [name], at the bug place. He's an entomologist... so I brought the larvae up the road to him. They were actually all in there, they were having a meeting including [name] the boss. So they passed the little thing around that I had the worms in and they said, "Yeah, yeah that's crane fly." And they said there's a nematode for it, I think it's spiderama? So I phoned the bug factory up in [place name] and they sent me down 6 million of these things, which is a little packet about this big [holds fingers about four inches apart]. And so we used them, and it didn't do anything... They're [the crane fly are] just too tough. And then I talked to a guy who supplies this kind of stuff in [place name], and he said to try the BT, that that might work, and just put it on the lettuce and when they eat it, it might kill them, and it didn't.

Katie: So you were pretty stuck on what to do there?

John: Yeah and by that time the whole greenhouse is shot right? So we've lost the whole crop in the greenhouse. So we thought, well the chickens will eat just about anything that moves, so let's just put chickens in there and see what

happens, so we took about thirty chickens and put them in there...

Katie: Oh, so you had the solution the whole time eh?

John: Yeah but then you see it causes a problem.

Katie: Because of the manure?

John: Yeah so you can't grow a food crop on it.

Katie: Oh, so that's why you put that you had to sow the buckwheat in there.

John: Yeah... if you put chickens in there because of the crane fly... then you have to put a cover crop in after that. I germinated the buckwheat until it got up to three or four inches and then we just tilled it in.

A section within the IOPA application asks farmers to document helpful tips to pass on to their colleagues in the organic community. In response John documented his story of a crane fly infestation. Speaking with John about his 'tip' with the filled-out application in front of us, it became apparent that the tip itself involved allowing "30 laying hens" access to an infested crop "for one week" to rid a field of crane fly larvae. This was a particularly good tip – John was visibly pleased with it - as two different methods suggested by professionals in the field did not eliminate the infestation. Yet, while John's chickens "took care of the problem," he follows the suggestion with: "We then sowed buckwheat and later tilled it in." The sowing of the buckwheat is extraneous to the tip; it is not the innovative information that would be helpful to other farmers looking for a solution to a crane fly infestation. Rather, this sentence is included by John as demonstrative of his compliance with the standards, which prohibit the growing of a food crop on soil with raw manure. John has read and interpreted the standards, enacted them on his farm, and in turn has read and understood the purpose of the application form as a text that must demonstrate his compliance with the standards. He has created this text to represent his work in the institutional process and has thus documented his compliance with the organic standards.

Demonstrating compliance with the regulating text – the BC organic standards -

is a common theme throughout John and Karen's descriptions of the annual certification verification process. A typical inspection as described by Karen involves a farm tour in which the verification officer knows which things to look for and what questions to ask to potentially reveal a farmer's non compliance with the standards. Armed with her/his own interpretation of the organic standards, the farmer similarly knows what the inspector is looking for, anticipating the kinds of questions that will be asked and the kinds of answers the inspector will need to hear and document to reveal the farmer's compliance or non-compliance to certifying board members. For example, Karen describes bringing a verification officer into her greenhouse knowing he would ask about some seedlings that didn't look healthy as the unhealthy plants pose a scenario where use of a 'disallowed' fertilizer may be desirable. Anticipating a casual "oh what are you doing about this?" question, Karen describes offering up the sought after information with "oh we've been to the soil test and they're deficient in potassium so we're adding fish fertilizer [an allowed substance]." If there were anything to hide from the verification officer, however, the farm tour would probably not be a particularly astute way of discovering it, as Karen explains:

Karen: You're kind of just going around and showing them everything. And then they want to look in your shed to see what amendments you have there. They want to see the whole farm, so they walk everywhere on the farm. I had an old fridge one time and they opened it to see, cause you know they just want to make sure you're not hiding anything, even though you totally could [laughing] because you could just bring it somewhere else.

Yet unlike the farm tour, it would be very difficult to hide 'non-compliance' from the verification officer during the audit portion of the inspection. Karen uses an example to

explain how - whether or not a fertilizer bag is ever found on the farm - sales receipts can be used to indicate whether farmers could be using 'disallowed' fertilizers. She explains: "the producers [who] use alfalfa meal, which is a fertilizer, if they're producing tons and tons and tons of greens then they better have tons and tons and tons of alfalfa meal [receipts], otherwise they're using some other fertilizer." It is the constant collection, retention and organization of these receipts along with the written, dated records of farm work that comprises the certified organic farmer's record-keeping: a part of organic farming John struggles with and Karen has learned to embrace.

### **Record Keeping - The Time it Takes**

The first text John produced for me to see on my second visit to his farm was a letter from the certification committee last year, certifying his farm on a conditional basis. He handed the letter to me and asked me to read it, watching intently as I did. I think I disappointed him when I looked up blankly from the page. I could tell he was waiting for a response, but I was uncertain as to how to react until his questions to me revealed how he felt about the letter and the basis for his conditional certification:

John They think we have nothing to do other than sit around and write... like I'll show you what I they sent me last year... [looking through papers]... here you go. That's what they sent... [waits as I read]... Which is pretty snippy, would you say? ... [waits for reaction] Would you? "I don't seem to take it seriously?!"

Indeed, the letter accused John of "not taking record keeping seriously." This statement

was followed by a referral to “COABC Standard 3.2: Record Keeping Audit Trail.”

John then showed me the applicable standard in one of his many copies of the BC organic standards, which he appears to keep throughout his home. The standard read as follows:

### 3.2.1 Required

- 1) An Organic Land and Resource Crop Management Register kept in an orderly and auditable form which includes at least the following information pertaining to each production unit. This information will provide a complete audit trail from farm to final sale (final sale means when the product in question leaves possession of the producer):
    - a) Input records
    - b) Crop yields
    - c) Receipts for purchases and sales
    - d) Copies of valid certified organic certificates from all sources of organic products
- (COABC, 2005)

As a farmer can be decertified for non-compliance with any standard, John risks decertification for poor or incomplete record keeping. Moreover, the institutionalized program for organic certification relies heavily on this complex, detailed form of record keeping. John spoke of both the centrality and the hassle of keeping farm records:

John: I’m supposed to yeah, have everything that they can say ready. And they can say, like how many strawberries did you pick on June 23?

Katie: They can say that?

John: Yeah! And I have to go yeah, OK, and I’ve got to find that, and here, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>... (opening a receipt book and pointing to applicable section).

Katie: And you’ve written that all up!

John: Yeah! Like I don’t, I don’t do it on the daily basis, but I do know I can find it.

Katie: So if you can’t, you have to make something up I guess? I mean what do you do?

John: Well I have to have something in writing. I have to have a record of it right? Like I’ll show you with the eggs...

Katie: Well as if you have the time, like you said. Like, how do you take records then? I guess they want you to sit down every day and... how long would it take if you did it the way they say?

- John: Every day. For us it would take an hour anyway.
- Katie: An hour a day.
- John: Yeah.
- Katie: So how does it actually happen then. Do you try to do it every few days?
- John: Well no. What I do is I collect it all up. Like we don't keep track if somebody comes up the drive and buys a dozen eggs. Like we don't write down '[name] bought a dozen eggs today for four dollars.' You know, we don't do that.
- Katie: [laughing] No.
- John: It would take five hours! And we're just not into that. So what we do is we take, all the eggs that we sell to anybody, like [store name], here's Dec. 4, they bought thirty-three dozen eggs right? [showing receipt book] And what I've done for them is I've got uh, see here's eggs, I didn't write down the dates but here's January, and I didn't write all the dates for those but we've got invoices so if they say, well who bought 105 dozen? I could tell you, I could look it up on the date that it was sold on. [Katie - yep] Which I think is good enough. Right?
- Katie: And is that enough for them?
- John: Well we'll see, we might get another snippy letter then.

John's referral here to the "snippy letter" indicates the presence of this text and his interpretation of it in guiding his record-keeping work this year. While John does not keep records in the way he suspects is required, this text (the letter) has altered his interpretation of the standards. His reading of the letter has spurred work processes aimed to satisfy this year's verification officer and certification committee. John hopes his efforts will be "good enough."

When asked about preparing for the next inspection, record-keeping was then not surprisingly a central concern for John:

- Katie: So I wondered about what kind of things you show them while they're here. What kinds of things you do to make an inspection go smoothly.
- John: Yeah. I usually try and have all the paper work ready. You know like receipt books and all that kind of stuff so that when they do spot checks on that we can pull it out. But that doesn't always happen. ...Like there's one receipt book that we can't find – if we used 8 of them then we can only find seven [laughing].

Katie: That's life!

John: Well unfortunately they don't always look at it like that.

John's lost receipt book is part of the messiness of everyday life on a farm in which people and animals take precedence over the writing and recording John is "just not into." However, in preparation for an inspection, John attempts to pull his paperwork together to create a semblance of organization, which he perceives is expected by the verification officer. The text (letter) / text (standards) → reader/work → text (records) process involves John's interpretation of last year's certification letter, which alters his interpretation of the organic standards and in turn mediates his production of this year's records.

Like John, Karen emphasizes the centrality of record keeping to successful organic certification; and she too recalls a letter she received in which "they basically said next year better go better." Initially Karen was taught how to keep her records through a "workshop that IOPA did on certification papers." This formal learning along with her interpretation of the purpose for the audits guides her recordkeeping work. As follows, she explains the audits as she has come to understand them, and in turn the work she does to demonstrate her 'competence':

Karen: Basically what they want for certification is for you to prove that you are growing everything that you are selling so that you're not running a laundering process through your farm. And that's interesting to think about. And part of it is also a test of your competence, so they want to know your management practices, what you've done when you've had problems, just so they can be sure you know what you're doing. So if a big problem comes up, like my club root... I would just document those things as happening."

Karen describes the annual re-certification inspection as a two part process beginning with the farm tour that is “usually fun” and “kind of like show and tell where you just go around and show them what you’re doing and they’ll ask questions,” followed by the audit that is “always a lot of paper everywhere, which gives me anxiety.” She explains the audit process, or ‘scary part’ as follows:

Karen: Well basically they do this audit – that’s the scary part, but it’s kind of cool when it works. [laughing] I always think it’s magic when it works. So you’re supposed to keep all of your receipts, and then you have a journal and then you have a sales book. And then the verification officer will go down and say, oh so you sold fifty pounds of spinach on August 28<sup>th</sup> so tell me about that spinach. So you go, ok, in my journal, oh look I planted it on May 4<sup>th</sup> and they you can say how much seed you put down, what you amended the bed with, how much compost you put in, where you got that compost from. And they just ask about all these things, so you flip to your seed receipts and you can say ok, I got the seeds from here. So you trace it all back for them.

Karen, however, was not always able to just “flip to” the needed receipts. Like John, she has been “reprimanded” via a letter from IOPA for insufficient record keeping:

Karen: So [I had] this audit that didn’t go well. I think I hadn’t kept the journal as well as I should have [laughing]. Ok I know I didn’t! So I just – guessed. And then it didn’t work when they tried. So I was like [laughing] “oh yeah I probably planted it sometime.” And each crop has its - you know that spinach has about 70 days and you know that the beets are about 80 days – so there are ranges that it should fit - and mine didn’t. And then when they asked to see the receipts I didn’t have them all and yeah, it was messy. So I was reprimanded in a letter, but they basically said, ‘next year better go better.’ But I think that because I had already been certified for three or four years... they knew it was just that I was incompetent with paper and it wasn’t that I was doing anything wrong.

Yet since the “audit that didn’t go well” Karen has altered her recordkeeping habits to suit the verification process. Her opinion of recordkeeping in general has also changed:

Karen: You should do [record keeping] anyway, that’s the thing. It’s so good to have all those records done, and you totally wouldn’t do them if you weren’t scared of the audit. So it makes you keep records. It really makes us think “oh you have to write down when you planted that spinach,” and then if that spinach is awesome, we can look back at when we planted it and say “hey that’s the right time or the right way to plant it.”... It’s really hard. And there’s a lot of paperwork. But at the same time, I wouldn’t do the paperwork if it wasn’t for the certification, and it’s totally helped me with my business. If I wasn’t forced to keep all those receipts they’d probably fly out the window as I’m driving [laughing]. And that’s what happened in the first years. I just didn’t – I couldn’t - until I said “if I’m going to farm this way I need all these papers, and so I’m going to get a book and put them all in and file them.” So I’m in favour of all the paperwork because I think farmers in general don’t keep paperwork, and as a result they don’t know how much money they are making or not making, and they don’t really care! A lot of them don’t really care because they don’t realize that if you track your dollars, that’s how you make money... I didn’t start making money on the farm until we had a bookkeeper that kept me in line, and we were able to see just where we were losing money.

Thus Karen is ‘in favour’ of recordkeeping while John is not. The difference between the two points of view could arguably be chalked up to personality, or to variation in worldview (including a person’s acceptance of the complex and culturally-specific conceptual background that provides for ‘common sense’ as it is our common sense that makes Karen’s explanation for her embrace of recordkeeping so easily understandable); however, delving in another direction it seems important to look to the material differences between John and Karen’s farms, and resultantly the difference in the time it takes for each of them to keep sufficient records for organic verification.

John contends that it would take him anywhere from one to five hours per day –

essentially an impossible amount of time - for him to do recordkeeping in the way he reckons is expected. Karen, however, does her paperwork daily and has come to find the task quite manageable:

Katie: How much work is [recordkeeping]? Is it daily?

Karen: Well once it's in your consciousness to write stuff down it takes only maybe ten minutes.

Katie: So it's being organized basically?

Karen: Yeah. [laughing] And then like the night before your farm verification it's a matter of taking all the receipts – because we get our receipts from everywhere – and just compiling them in an order where we can find them when the time comes, and then keeping the empty seed packets.

In contrast to John, Karen states that she keeps adequate records in less than ten minutes of work per day. Moreover while John spends an entire weekend assembling his paperwork in preparation for his organic verification, Karen manages to compile her receipts and seed packets in one evening just prior to the inspection. Yet not surprisingly the respective farms John and Karen document differ greatly from each other. John's farm, as aforementioned, is a mixed operation that incorporates a variety of animals such as pigs, lambs, meat chickens and laying birds along with a wide assortment of vegetables and fruits grown over many fields, three greenhouses and a sizeable orchard. By contrast, Karen is exclusively a grower. Her farm is small, and although still diverse, her range in crop variety has lessened over the years. Karen describes her farm and its contents as follows:

Karen: We're a [small number] farm... I am a tenant farmer, so my husband and I rent our land... I farmed it on my own for [a few] years and then my husband joined me, so this is our tenth year on the land.... I would say from personal experience, the smaller your farm the more you can gross per acre... last year we made about 54,000 off the acre, which is extremely

high I think for per acre gross... We don't have that many expenses, like [my partner and I] each have a truck and we need two trucks to bring produce because we're always both going to the markets and things like that, and then we have our rent per acre. The average rent in [area name] is \$40 per acre per month, and our landlords just charge us that, which is great... And our costs, I guess the irrigation system is probably about a 1000 and then greenhouse. Well when I first started farming my last partner and I built the green house, like a wooden greenhouse, and it's massive. It took us six months, it was terrible! But it was almost free and it's still standing there today... And then one of our biggest costs is compost... we get this stuff called sea soil and its fish and chips – so fish waste and wood chips – and that is \$55 a yard and we'll use maybe forty yards a year so that's a big cost.

Katie: So that's a certified organic product?

Karen: Yeah it's accepted by IOPA. But that is one point about our farm that I really hate – I really wish we made our own compost. But we don't have a tractor so we can't turn it.

Katie: Yes I guess with the [small] size farm it's a little bit harder to have the complete system within the farm

Karen: Yeah I mean it'd be nice to have animals. I did have animals at one point.

Katie: Yes, if you could tell me what exactly you do have on the farm, and maybe describe how it has changed – if at all – over the years?

Karen: We sell fruits and vegetables only. When we first started I did some chickens and lamb but that was terrible. Like it didn't work out, it was too small to fence them and I didn't have the infrastructure for animals. You really need really good fencing.

Katie: So that would be your main barrier then to incorporating animals into your farm at this point?

Karen: Yeah. You have to – yeah size, even though the land worked out really well if I could have kept them fenced in. But they would break out and eat all the food and run around the neighbourhood [laughing], it was terrible! So just fruits and vegetables. I would say over the years my diversity has really gone down. I used to do like thirty crops. And it hasn't all been from the market, that we've kind of specialized, but from disease. You know, the disease pressure builds up. Like on a conventional farm, for example there's a disease called club root that affects all of the cabbage families, and on a conventional farm you could just put hydrolized lime on the soil and boom! It's gone. But with organic you can't. And so we've got this disease where we can't grow the cabbage family. So that's a lot of our food. And then we've got this disease where we can't grow tomatoes or peppers so that's hard. It's called Verticillium Wilt and it's a virus of the soil. A conventional farmer would fumigate the soil, and I think the resulting imbalance from doing that would be – well you just couldn't in an organic system. So we just don't grow those, and hopefully one day that disease will go away, after repeated crop rotations.

Katie: So what crop then do you do the most of?

Karen: So we focus on a lot of really profitable crops. One is salad greens, or mixed greens and strawberries, lettuces, carrots, beets, chard and kale, purple carrots and different coloured carrots. We used to do all kinds of tomatoes, all heritage tomatoes.

Katie: And how many hours do you work a week?

Karen: Like all the time. Pretty much my whole life [laughing].

Katie: So how many hours, like maybe a double work week then?

Karen: Yeah probably 80. Like that's 80 from May until the end of August.

Katie: And your partner's working that much as well...

Karen: Yes.

Katie: So it is a lot of work! For your combined income of about 50,000 dollars.

Karen: It's a lot of work... But another thing with our scale is we hardly have any packaging, we just use recycled boxes, we drive an old van.

Katie: So your scale keeps your costs down?

Karen: Yes. I think as soon as you start getting mechanized your costs go way up and your control over everything really slips so you can't have the high quality stuff for the niche market prices. And I think your quality of life drops as well because all of a sudden you are really dependent on labour, and when you're hiring a lot of labour, there's no money.

Katie: Do you get time off?

Karen: Yeah, in the winter. Like the summer is really busy but then as soon as September is done we just do one harvest a week.

Katie: Do you ever pick up other jobs then?

Karen: Yeah I do.

Thus while Karen 'really hates' that she does not produce her own compost and laments that 'it would be nice to have animals,' a combination of factors make compost and livestock or poultry unfeasible for her farm. Specifically, throughout her account Karen points to 1) the negative relationship between acreage and profit 2) the positive relationship between farm equipment and cost 3) the positive relationship between fencing and cost 4) limitations of being a tenant farmer 5) crop disease as it pertains to certified organic solutions and in turn, ability to grow certain crops and 6) the negative relationship between hired labour and profit, as major contributing factors to the size and scope of her farm. Yet despite using an off-farm source of compost, Karen's farm yields 10-15 varieties of fruits and vegetables and is impressively productive for its size.

To verify their certification Karen and John must keep written records pertaining to each crop variety, all compost, all animals and all animal feed. They must save every seed packet, every receipt for grain or inputs, document where they bought their stock, record every compost rotation, every egg, every input, and retain receipts from every sale. Each component of the farm involves its own paperwork, so it follows that more components mean more work. Verification officer Mack emphasized the centrality of a farmer's complete recordkeeping to the verification process. Comprehensive farm records presented in an organized fashion are absolutely integral to his ability to carry out his work. Mack explains as follows:

Mack: I mean, I don't believe everything [farmers] say, I only believe what I observe myself. Like I snoop into everything... They have to have very comprehensive records... Basically I should be able to go into their records and do an audit and track, you know, a carrot that I have in front of me from the time they bought the seed until it was delivered wherever else. So everything that happened to it, where it came from as seed, any inputs, where it was planted...

Katie: The farmer keeps all these records herself?

Mack: Yeah the farmer keeps the records... Yeah. Any inputs, labour. Any kind of activity done on the crop like weeding, or planting or harvesting or whatever... Like the big operations, like at grain farms for example, they have like giant bins of grain that all have lot numbers, and then they're shipped by lot number. Stuff like that.

Katie: And they produce these kinds of things for you to look at then?

Mack: Yeah, ideally yes. [laughs]

Katie: Not always?

Mack: Yeah, well it's kind of like the weakest part because farmers are not usually good with the record keeping... But they should. They should have a record of any time they do anything, which is pretty extreme I know...

During an inspection Mack states that he should only believe, and moreover record, what he has observed himself. This facet of his work - or action - stems from his reading and interpretation of standardized IOIA coursework, his reading and

interpretation of the regulatory IOIA manual, and his reading and interpretation the IOIA code of ethics. Moreover, as the farm inspection and audit combined are to last a maximum of two hours, it is important to Mack that farmers quickly and efficiently produce organized, comprehensive written documentation detailing all farm components, work processes, transactions. From these records Mack can create the requisite report that in turn allows the certification committee to assess his documented version of the reality of the farm, in relation to the regulatory BC organic standards.

From Mack's experience farmers in general tend not to enjoy paperwork and may struggle with keeping adequate records for a verification officer's audit trail; however, farm size and biodiversity can further be related to the farmer's capabilities in regards to good record keeping. John feels farmers with smaller farms than his own – less acreage and fewer components or less diversity on the farm – tend to have a much easier time keeping adequate records of their significantly fewer work processes and transactions. He explains the difference in recordkeeping experiences as he perceives it:

John: The thing that I find... is that a lot of the people have a little tiny farm, it's not their main livelihood. Their husband works another job and they keep a half an acre or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre, or something like that. And that's what they do, and they grow all vegetables from May until October, right in the garden, OK? We're growing year round, we probably sell thirty or forty times what they would sell on an acre, and we have dozens and dozens of customers.

Katie: Yep, and different things, too. Like is it separate records for eggs from...?

John: Yeah. From meat, from the salad. Like here's all, everything that comes out of the field, it's a different thing right.

Katie: So probably the people that would have the easiest time with record keeping would be the very small farmers or then the very bigger farmers who are doing like one kind of crop...

John: Yeah, or three or four crops...

Katie: Then a more diverse farm of this size would be the hardest?

John: It's the hardest. At least I think that.

Unlike him, John believes seasonal growers on small or partial acreages are able to keep records in the way that is expected of them. Karen of course fits with John's description of a small grower, and thus finds recordkeeping to be a manageable task for her farm.

From his experiences Mack finds it is the farm operations at each end of the spectrum - the very large farm and very small - that keep the best records:

Mack: I think that some of the bigger operations might be better at record keeping just because of the nature of their operations and because of other requirements they might have. Like if they're supplying to processors who want their product to be certified organic then they would require records because they have to show that all the product was certified organic and, I don't know, maybe the government might have stringent tracking requirements for big operations... Like the big operations, like grain farms for example, they have giant bins of grain and they're shipped by lot number. Stuff like that... But I've also seen very small operations where the guy has like only one field of crop, so that makes everything very easy for him.

Considering the complexity of the record keeping process - involving separate records for each livestock category, for crops, for on-farm seeding and composting procedures and so forth - the farmers that must keep the most extensive records, and thus might have the most difficulty with record keeping, are those with intricate, self-sufficient, biodiversity systems. While John's farm in which pigs consume waste and chickens heat the greenhouse and "make litter" for compost for an abundance of various crops may be held up as a model for sustainable agriculture, it may also be the most complicated sort of farm to textually record. Specifically in regards to time - that Smith explains is not to be understood as an abstract property but rather as 'the time it takes,' a dimension central to a conception of work (Smith, 2005: 154-155) - the extended time it

takes to create adequate records for a small scale, full time, year round, biodiversity farm may mean that the organic “playing field” is neither standardized nor levelled in that it elicits various experiences and various outcomes based on who farms and how they farm.

While Karen does suggest that her record keeping serves a self-educational purpose that aids her in running a successful business, record keeping itself does not of course serve a function in regards to sustainable agriculture. Rather, it achieves administrative purposes and fits with the business of producing and selling food in a contemporary capitalist society. The work of a verification officer is centered on the production of both the certification application and comprehensive farm records, and in turn records become central to the work of the organic farmer. Mack explains the role of record keeping in reference to how his work is evaluated:

Katie: OK. And then I wondered how your work is evaluated. How they know if you’re doing a good job.

Mack: ...[M]y assumption is that they would keep a file on every inspection. I think how they evaluate the work is that my report should tell them everything they want to know about the operation. They shouldn’t have to call me up and say well what about this or that. So if that were the case, if the report was not meeting their needs then that would be unsatisfactory work... I never have been sent back, but they have the possibility of doing that. Like if there is something that’s questionable I guess, but the ideal is that I check everything out. [K- yes]. And its very thorough. Basically I have to be the eyes for the certification association, so everything that is applicable to them is important.

Importantly, Mack identifies his role as “eyes for the certification association” rather than, for example, as a voice for the organic farmers within the system. Asking Mack about evaluation practices revealed that the ‘thoroughness’ of his work is key to doing a

good job; to producing a document for the certification body that successfully fits with and contributes to the administrative organization of organic farming. To achieve necessary “thoroughness” Mack has to rely on the work of farmers, in their creation of comprehensive farm records and their presentation of those records in an organized and timely manner. Later in his account, when asked how he detects fraudulent organic farming, the discussion again returned to these texts farmers produce – the records and the certification application that are essential to Mack’s ability to do his job:

Katie: How would you detect fraud? What are the indicators and how would you write it?

Mack: For it to be caught it would have to be very obvious. So if their application didn’t match up to the reality of the situation. If they were keeping the weeds down with manual labour and their records say they paid someone to work, you know, X number of hours weeding, and realistically that number of hours wouldn’t realistically get rid of the weeds in the way it was done - if the field was bare or whatever, then I’d say these don’t appear to match up. And then maybe that there was some kind of situation. But I don’t know that I would say that. It would be difficult to do.

Katie: I guess that relates to records again. Because if something went on with weeding that they didn’t have a record of you couldn’t know.

Mack: Yeah. That’s why everything should be recorded. That’s the only way to test it out. The only way to catch someone is if things don’t match up and like they say that they got X number, a certain number of yield, but that yield’s not realistic, that’s the only we can catch them unless they leave an illegal input box just sitting around!

The farmer’s work in recordkeeping is central to Mack’s job, and more generally to the institutional process. It is a process that characteristically relies on texts to mediate and regulate daily life. The records themselves do not concretely contribute to sustainable agriculture, to animal welfare or to healthier food production. Their function is to allow for social organization, for the extra-local coordination of activity that makes an institutionalized program for organic farming possible. Texts, activated via the work of

farmers and verification officers, come into play in extended sequences of text → reader → action, which facilitate centralized organization of certified organic farming programs. In this way the organic standards shift from being a farmer's educational tool to being a means through which farmers are regulated, while record-keeping functions as a technology whereby this shift can be implemented.

### **Officers and Audits, the Good the Bad and the Ugly**

Social relations are constituted in work practices of organic certification verification. Farmers' experiences of inspections, along with their own work practices in preparing for and doing inspections, are altered through the now text mediated propriety of verification officers, referred to as their code of 'ethics' (see Appendix B). John had decided opinions when asked to speak about his personal experiences with verification officers during inspections:

John: I like some of the inspectors; I find them really good because they will tell you what somebody else is doing in a certain circumstance to you know, to control weeds etc... Well like [name] was an inspector. And she was really good. [Name] knows a lot of stuff. She's very knowledgeable about the standards and she knows methods of doing things, and if you had something going on she'd say, "well you know, phone [name] so and so, he's got something the same and he's doing something different with it."

Katie: So she'd actually try to help you out rather than just look through your records...

John: Oh yeah.

Katie: Do you find then that it's valuable to you to have inspectors come?

John: Only if they're helpful. Otherwise it's a pain in the ass.

Moving on to discuss the history of the organic standards in BC, John again spoke about 'good' inspectors. From his point of view a good inspector is personable, helpful and knowledgeable about organic farming:

John: Well, the first inspector that we had here was a guy called [name]... Back when he was an inspector he was great because he was a farmer as well, with quite a bit of knowledge. And he would pass on a good tip to you. So, well I guess now their rules are more stringent... When we started certifying, way back then you didn't have to have all this paperwork. And when the inspector came he didn't spend a lot of time here. You know, it was trust.

Specifically two types of verification officer were identified by John: those who would "pass on a good tip" because they seemed to trust the farmer and personally care about the farm, and those who were detached from the process and concerned primarily with the paperwork, detecting infractions rather than educating and sharing the farming experience. The detached verification officer who does not make personal recommendations simply represents a waste of time from the standpoint of the busy farmer who feels he/she must jump through hoops to gain certification each year. Interestingly, as John talked on it became apparent that his notion of the best officers referred to ones of the past, and that only more recently the officers had been of the 'unhelpful' variety:

John: Well [inspectors are] not all the same. And actually, when we started our farm there were no certifiers on the island at all. And when IOPA started there were two things that the inspector wrote about that were subjective. That was that [the inspector] had to write an opinion as to the farmer's knowledge of organic standards, and what he thought as to whether he thought his compliance was a voluntary thing, or whether he was just doing it because he had to.

Katie: And they don't do that anymore?

John: No. No, no, no.

Katie: And I guess it's that they can't now?

John: Yeah. And all that has developed since. I mean you're talking about a whole new deal here. Because when we started there was nothing on the Island so I - you know the soil association of Great Britain? [Katie: Yeah] I got their standards. And that's what we used as a guide, to learn, when we started. But since that's happened, I mean the inspector's course probably started maybe 12

years ago... and what we did then was we raised some money to hold a course for inspectors and we brought the guys up from the [United] States, and then anybody who wanted to take this course, you know it was a four day or five day course with an exam at the end of it. And that's how we started and that's how it's changed. Now I think its two weeks and they have it all over North America, the same all over.

Originally the work John did in regards to organic standards was self-administered - he sought out standards in order to learn the organic farming practices he is ethically committed to. The first verification officers, prior to the current organization of certified organic farming in BC, supported the farmers that they knew to be personally committed to farming organically. The relationship between farmer and inspector involved interpersonal exchange and interpersonal trust that is not characteristic of formal, text mediated relations. The resulting reports of the past prioritized the verification officer's perception of the farmers' personal commitment to organic farming, rather than a more objective engagement with farm records for the assessment of the farmer's compliance with the codified set of standards. The first reports were more subjective, not only in that they involved the inspector's opinion but in that they characterized the farmer's work in regards to his/her own subjective values, beliefs and integrity. The later shift - from the "good" to the "pain in the ass" inspectors - coincides with an administrative change. That is the standardized training of verification officers via the IOIA course.

During her interview, Karen also remarked on changes to the annual certification verification inspections. It was this change in process that led to her first and only "bad audit:"

- Karen: I had a visit where it was just terrible – but they hadn't been doing that audit thing before and they just started it...
- Katie: What brought that about?
- Karen: I don't know? I guess maybe somebody thought about it? I don't know why it started. It's a great idea though it's a really tight way to make sure that everything you have was grown by you properly...
- Katie: So before it was more, just verbal?
- Karen: Yeah and they just looked through your receipts before, but they didn't know what to look for specifically, so now they go through your sales records and so "oh, so twenty pounds of garlic," or they can go the other way and say "so this bag of potassium – where did that go?" And so you look at the date that you bought it and say "ok well I probably used it in you know, in whatever, and look there's some left." So you can trace the amount that you used. And that one's not as tight as the sales receipts but they can just find out, like one way is some producers use alfalfa meal which is a fertilizer so if they're producing tons and tons and tons of greens then they better have tons and tons and tons of alfalfa meal, otherwise they're using some other fertilizer. And it's neat the way it works.

Karen was comfortable with farm inspections until one year a new format for the audit was introduced that potentially put her certification at risk. Her good farming had not changed, yet the everyday world within which she farmed had been altered by absent others, in this case by way of establishment of centrally organized, standardized inspection procedures. From within the everyday experience it can be difficult to know - or unreasonable to take the time to discover – how such changes in daily activity come about. But often these are changes coordinated from outside the local site of lived experience. Mack's account helps to explain the increases in daily recordkeeping work farmers Karen and John have undertaken as a result of the inspections they underwent on their farms.

Mack was trained through the standardized IOIA course. His account confirms that the inspection procedure has changed greatly over the last decade, and in particular that it no longer involves the verification officer 'writing himself into the report' (or as

John described, the inspection is no longer written in a blatantly subjective manner.) A verification officer is neither to draw on his own opinion of a farmer nor to try to forge a trusting interpersonal relationship between himself and the farmer:

Mack: Well, when they first started it was all based on trust.

Katie : Yeah and I gather they didn't have any guidelines.

Mack: That's right. But now it's not based on trust at all. There's no trust...

Katie: Is there then any way that you would indicate to the certifying body that you thought a guy wasn't trustworthy? Because as I understand it, you're saying that you wouldn't indicate that you thought he was, for example 'a trustworthy kind of guy.' That's not going to get portrayed in the report?

Mack: No.

This shift away from the interpersonal 'trust' that the verification inspection process "was all based on" before its institutionalization is not surprising within the context of institutional processes in contemporary modernity. Institutions rely on texts to achieve their objectives via lengthy abstracted sequences of coordinated activity. Interpersonal trust is not integral to text mediated ruling relations. It is trust in abstract relations that is imperative (Giddens, 1990). Institutional ethnographers Marie Campbell and Frances Gregor explain that from a very young age we come to trust and participate "without much notice" in the textually organized world that facilitates coordination of human activity, divorced from real time and geographic space (2002: 30).

Mack explains that he does not attempt to develop relationships with the farmers he inspects and asserts that the inspection entails only 'objective' observation. In speaking about his work, Mack reveals that his interpretation and enactment of the IOIA inspector's Code of Ethics guides his 'objective' focus and in turn mediates his relationship with both the certification body and the farmer:

Mack: I don't believe I am supposed to [make recommendations to the certification body]... I don't feel that I should be doing that really. I feel that I should just be saying this is the situation and make up your mind. I can't certify and I make it really clear to them that I'm not certifying them, and I'm not allowed to give them advice. So for example if they have a problem with a particular crop and they need to figure out how they can grow it in a better manner then I can say, you know, go to this web site and they have good advice, but I can't tell you how to do it.

Katie: Why do you feel that? Why can't you?

Mack: Because then that's breaching, as something against the ethical code of conduct. [Gestures to 'code of ethics' on table in front of him].

Katie: Why would that be?

Mack: Because – you know I'm not really sure why [laughs]. I think it's because it could be seen that I'm saying if you do this, then you will meet the requirement and you will be certified. Or something along those lines... Like – it has to be like pretty far apart – like I can't inspect – I wouldn't and I shouldn't- inspect someone that I'm really close friends with for example, or that I've had financial dealings, or I can't work with someone within the next two years of inspecting them...

Not only do the IOIA ethics influence Mack to avoid forming relationships with farmers during inspections, but moreover Mack's interpretation of the ethics mean avoiding work with any farmer that he has formed a prior relationship with. The verification officers trained by the IOIA are to become third party, detached, objective contractors.

Beyond the organic standards, two texts specifically mediate the work of an IOIA verification officer: Mack showed me his giant course manual produced by the IOIA and his copy of the IOIA Code of Ethics. These regulatory texts that organize the interaction are altering the relationship between farmer and verification officer. The administrative shift that has come with the institutionalized program for organic farming in BC has changed the certification experience for the farmer – as John explains - from positive and potentially helpful to negative and time consuming with little or no benefit from the point of view of the farmer. Comparable to a story Smith

tells (2001: 171-173), it seems the COABC administration “reaches down into and, by transforming the organizational texts” (namely through implementation of the standardized IOIA course, its manual and its code of ethics) it extra-locally transforms the immediate actual relationship between farmer and verification officer, altering the work and experience of organic farming and certification.

### **The Narrative Report – Observation and ‘Fact’**

A verification officer is guided by regulatory texts and in turn produces texts that become the work of institutionalizing organic farming. Using the farmer’s certification application and records, the verification officer tours the farm and audits the paperwork in order to author a report that the certification committee can use to assess/grant the farmer’s future certification status. Constructing an objectified version of the farmer’s component in the certified organic farming process is integral to the process of embedding an institutional agenda in a setting. As follows, Mack describes the work he does to ensure no farmer complaints and a good evaluation of his work from the certification committee:

Mack: Write a really thorough report. Be as professional as I can with the farmer. And explain to them exactly what’s happening and what my role is...

Katie: Then by being ‘as professional as you can’ you just mean?

Mack I mean being thorough, not wasting their time, talking about relevant things, Also sometimes farmers get a little bit chatty [laughing] – so you have to remind them that [the certifying body is] actually paying for you by the hour.

As the “eyes for the certifying body,” through farm inspections Mack must be able to determine what information or which observations are applicable to the committee and then compose a ‘thorough’ narrative report to meet their needs. This is work in the

service of social organization. As “everything that is applicable to [the certifying committee] is important” Mack must learn to recognize and bypass extraneous information provided by the “chatty” farmers - information that is potentially important to the farmers themselves but not relevant to the institutionalized certification process.

While the organic standards serve as a multidimensional regulatory text - delineating what is applicable to the certifying body and guiding the work of farmers and verification officers - the IOIA manual and code of ethics further serve as regulatory texts that specifically mediate the verification officer’s work in conducting a farm inspection and writing a narrative report. To learn how to inspect, a future verification officer must take the inspector’s course offered by the IOIA. This course does not provide the verification officer with knowledge of organic farming; rather, such knowledge is a tested requirement prior to taking the course, meaning that most inspectors are or have been organic farmers themselves. Thus instead of ‘how-to’ farming knowledge, the mandatory IOIA course teaches verification officers how to conduct and document the inspection itself:

Katie: Ok. So, everything you’ve learned to make these assessments is from that course and from this manual here? [gestures toward manual]

Mack: Um, well no. It’s from my previous knowledge of agriculture and my ongoing learning.

Katie: So you are allowed to draw on all sorts of knowledge well beyond what you learned in this course [gesturing to guidebook on table].

Mack: Oh yeah. Like you have to have like, from the beginning you have to have knowledge of organic agriculture, and they test you on it.

Katie: And how did you get your knowledge?

Mack: I got lots of it through self studies, and through working and apprenticing on farms. Yep.

Katie: How does this all factor into your hiring?

Mack: They actually in BC, they only hire active members of the Independent Organic Inspectors Association, you have to be a member of the IOIA, so you have to have taken a course on inspection, on how to inspect, so that’s

the course you have to have.

The IOIA aims to “promote consistency in the inspection process and serves to provide inspectors with good field techniques and uniform reporting methods” (Salmins, 1999: 1). It offers courses all over North America. Using a standardized test, the IOIA determines whether a prospective verification officer has the necessary agricultural background to proceed with the coursework. Sandra Salmins (1999), an organic verification officer who has written for an online magazine about her experiences in inspector training, explains the learning she did through the IOIA as it applies to the work she now does as a verification officer:

[Verification officers are taught] what to look for, how to look, and the importance of making accurate observations relevant to a report. The IOIA course emphasizes that the role of the inspector is to observe and report rather than to make recommendations. It is the [certifying body’s] responsibility to review the inspector’s report and make the decisions regarding recommendations. The course instructors also stressed the importance of ethics and confidentiality, emphasizing that inspectors must be professional and accountable (1999: 1).

Salmins’ description of the IOIA’s emphases coincides with Mack’s description of his work in which he draws on his prior knowledge of organic farming, claims to write ‘only what he observes,’ attempts to behave in a ‘professional’ manner, uses neutral ‘unbiased’ writing techniques, and continually observes the IOIA Code of Ethics. “A good inspector” (according to the IOIA criteria as opposed to farmer John’s criteria) “can make thorough, unbiased observations and provide concise, well-written reports on behalf of organic certifying bodies” (Salmins, 1999: 2).

According to Mack there are thirteen certifying bodies in the province of BC.

Each requires an objectively written report by an IOIA trained verification officer to annually verify the certification of every farmer under jurisdiction; however, certifying bodies may differ in regards to the format of the report they require. Reports range from a checklist, to jotted comments on the side of an application, to creation of the more comprehensive narrative report required by IOPA. IOPA provides the verification officer with a list of headings to construct a narrative report (see Appendix C). Selecting the heading ‘3.5 Buffer Zones’ I asked Mack to explain the work he would do to create this section of the report:

Katie: So maybe just take for example ‘buffer zones.’ What would you do for buffer zones?

Mack: So for buffer zones I would look at all sides of the farm... basically you have to control the possibility of contamination from outside. And then COABC standards have specified a minimum of 25 feet, so you look at stuff like, OK there’s a road right next door and its lots and lots of traffic so would 25 feet really be good, you know? Like they’re encouraged to plant trap crops like a big row of trees so the contamination will get stuck in the trees. Or you look at stuff like, OK so the neighbour next door is like a conventional orchardist and, there’s always these high winds that blow in this direction [gesturing with hands] and you know...

Katie: Wow you have to know a huge amount of stuff...

Mack: Oh yeah! Like you know, if buddy next door has... some kind of conventional operation and there could be a lot of run off because it’s up hill, we have to look at like, are the chemicals gonna be coming down onto the property? Is there water, is there a river coming through his property that comes onto this property? That could be contaminated by conventional livestock or by some kind of giant sewage leaking into it from his big pig operation or whatever.

Katie: So do you walk the perimeter then? How do you even know?

Mack: You look on their map. And you ask them questions about their neighbour. And then you actually go out and say, next door I can see a forest, or whatever.

Due to his prior knowledge of organic farming techniques Mack understands the practical advantage of maintaining space between a farm and its neighbours to prevent

cross contamination. In regards to an inspection, however, ‘buffer zones’ becomes a concept in relation to the organic standards, coinciding with a particular codified measurement. Mack’s work procedure during an inspection - walking the farm perimeter, measuring the distance between a road and crop, looking at the farm map and asking questions - are indicative of his IOIA training that is mediated by the course manual. In this way Mack mediates local actualities by bringing the IOIA codes into what can be seen and done in the local, engaging in practical activity that serves to institutionalize the local setting.

Delving into another example of a concrete activity that functions to institutionalize the local, I turned to a description of action previously generated by Mack and asked him to describe what he would do if he noticed potential “non-compliance” with organic standards:

Katie: Ok. Last time [we spoke] you used an example of a field totally devoid of weeds as a possible non-compliance with a standard. So if you saw that what would you ask the farmer and what would you write down?

Mack: Ok. I wouldn’t say to the farmer like this field is sketchy [both laugh] but I would probably say, what’s your weed control techniques? How do you do the weeding? And sort of questions about the weeding that would sort of give me a picture of what they did. And if they said, you know, “well I weed it all myself and I only do it once or twice a week,” then I would be like well maybe there’s a problem then. [laughs]

Katie: And would they have a record then as well, that you can look at?

Mack: They should. They should have a record of anytime they do anything, which is pretty extreme I know, but...

Katie: Yeah I just had no idea before I started this how much record keeping was involved!

Mack: Oh it’s huge.

Katie: So then what would you turn around and write down in our example about the weeds?

Mack: I might write down that the weeding – the amount of weed cover did not match up with the stated weeding program. Or if the weeding program wasn’t stated [in the records] – then this is what they say their weeding program is, however I observed that the field was totally bare of weeds,

and they don't really match up.

Katie: And then this explanation – would it always fall back on their record keeping then? Or integrity?

Mack: On their record keeping.

Katie: Ok, sorry just trying to go through this to make sure I understand. OK. What about things that maybe don't coincide with a standard? Because you said that you check between the application and what you see, and you're looking for discrepancies. Is this always in terms of a standard, or say for example, if their map portrayed one thing and then you got to their farm and it was different from the map...

Mack: I would definitely say that in my report. Yes, because when they put their application into the certifying association they are saying this is the way that it is. Often it is a little different because they're making changes – then I just note. But if they noted it or even if they were trying to hide it, I would say it either way. I would say this is how it was then, and this is how it is now.

Mack's interpretation of his training through the IOIA has led to his 'professional' conduct during inspections, meaning the relationship between farmer and verification officer can be described as reserved or detached. Mack laughs at the idea of saying, "this field looks sketchy," and describes his work process as asking questions that pertain specifically to standards then documenting verbatim the pertinent information provided by the farmer, verbally and through the records. Pertinent information generally relates to specific standards. Information that might not directly coincide with a standard, however, could become part of a report through the recording of discrepancies in a neutral "this is how it was manner." Mack explains, "I'm basically just there to assess the situation, and compare the application to the actual realities of their operation." The report devised by the verification officer makes use of the application paper in comparison with what is observed during the two-hour farm visit. By including any discrepancy between what a farmer says and what the inspector 'objectively' observes, it is conceivable that the certification committee could become

aware that a farmer may be “shifty,” within the scope of the ‘neutral and objective’ methods of documentation. Only in this way might Mack’s report portray the farmer’s degree of personal commitment to organic farming. Textually mediated by his learning of the IOIA manual and Code of Ethics, Mack would never directly include personal opinion or a subjective assessment of the farmer’s ‘organic integrity.’

The IOIA Code of Ethics in particular restricts Mack from making recommendations to the certifying committee in his report. He interprets the ethics to mean: “I should just be saying this is the situation and make up your mind.” He explains as follows:

Mack: Like if [the farmer] tell[s] me something and I can’t back it up – like if they tell me... ‘I have this harvesting equipment that I share with Bob who’s a conventional farmer,’ then what they should have is a letter from Bob saying, you know, ‘this is the clean out procedure.’ Like an affidavit saying that he’s cleaned it out before they used it. If they don’t have a letter then I say that they’ve used this equipment and they ‘tell me’ that they cleaned it out before using it. But I didn’t see it, so I can’t say it like ‘it’s a fact’ because basically, it’s just something that they told me, not something that I can verify.

Katie: So what would you write down then?

Mack: I would just say that producer stated that this equipment was cleaned out before he used it.

Katie: So then you just leave it up to the board to figure out whether that’s good enough or not.

Mack: Yeah exactly.

A farmer must provide textual evidence of his work to back up a claim. It is the very presence of a text - in this case a letter from conventional farmer ‘Bob’ - that allows Mack to document ‘fact’ in his report. Without this requisite text, Mack does not document ‘a fact’ because verbal explanations are not deemed verifiable within the text-based process. Instead Mack states what the farmer told him in a precise and neutral

manner, leaving judgment to further administration.

The verification officer's account of the farm - his work - serves to arrange the actual system of the farm - the actual work of the farmer - into a particular account that is useful for the purposes of the certification committee. Through a narrative report, Mack's interpretative work as third party independent inspector involves selecting and documenting a small portion of the real, messy, multifaceted and abundant work that goes on, on a farm. His neutral third party role coincides with contemporary modern trends and even legal statutes that prompt institutions to seek out independent 'objective witnesses' (Smith, 1999: 88). Mack produces a selective, objectified and partial depiction of the farmer based only on textually mediated 'relevant' information in the interests of organization. Through the report - an active text in the institutional process - this particularized objectified version of the farmer goes on through the sequential certification process to represent the farmer's actual subject being and farming experiences. In this way, the farmer's work enters into an abstracted system, beyond the local and particular, where it serves a function within the ruling relations.

To portray the 'objective' stance that is expected of him, Mack takes care to use neutral language in his report and to refer only to what he has observed:

Katie: And then, so you said you try to use pretty neutral language?

Mack: Yeah. Like I would say, for example if they were doing something that did not meet the standards – so for example say they put in a new treated post – OK. [opens standards, Mack and Katie are both looking at them] So I would say, 'farmer tells me that they've installed a new fence, for pasture using treated posts. This is in contradiction of 3.6.41,' for example.

To create a narrative report for the certification body Mack engages in a procedure for documenting events that makes them appear factual. This is creation of facticity. To

create a factual report Mack attempts to omit his own subjectivity from the report. It is Mack's impartial and detached writing style - organized by the regulatory texts – that mediates the semblance of an undifferentiated individual reporter. This reporter is not to be gendered, racialized, or classed but impossibly disembodied, capable of recording the truth as it occurred. In confining his communication to such neutral language and thoroughly reporting only what he has observed, Mack's report conveys to the certification committee that he has correctly adopted a 'professional' role, allowing them to read and work from the report that acts as the defining word regarding the farm. This narrative report becomes the documented fact from which the committee can then approach the more subjective - yet still textually mediated and categorically restricted - application provided by the farmer. By removing himself as an individual from the narrative report to provide a carefully selective, objectified version of the organic farmer, Mack's report appears as fact that can be objectively known, observable as such by anyone. The way Mack structures his narrative report is as an institutional actor and subject, part of the institutionalization of organizational interests - ruling interests - that coordinate the creation of this text within sequential relations of text mediated human activity for a particular purpose.

### **Tastes like Neoliberalism**

Programs for certified organic farming emerged and took shape within particularities of time and space. That is, in our contemporary political economic climate; a time of globalizing capitalism, expanding corporate privatization and a neoliberal trade agenda. Perhaps only under this historic lens does the rapid growth and

immense profitability of the current organic food market from its grassroots beginnings, make sense. As citizen becomes consumer, entrepreneurship the vehicle for personal success and common good, health and environment the responsibility of individuals, protection of trade the primary role of the State, everything in it a commodity to be bought and sold on the global free market and all of this enmeshed in the common sense way we interpret and act in the world; ultimately, the pursuit of elusive notions of social and ecological justice through 'sustainable' food systems grows into tricky, messy and heavily hegemonized business. What becomes apparent is that with ratification of organic certification programs, organic farming has taken on institutional forms. In so doing it has brought about considerable concern that it is coming to resemble the very system that enabled and exacerbated the harms it sought to resist.

Institutionalized programs for certified organic farming enter farmers into a matrix of textually mediated relations that order and organize their work. The organic playing field I aim here to explicate has indeed been 'levelled' in that one definition for organic farming and one standardized program currently encompass the gamut of various farmers throughout the province of BC, soon to be the country in harmony with the world. The interests served by this shift in scope are predictably dominant interests. With sadness Joan Dye Gussow (activist, author and farmer) articulates the discrepancy between grassroots initiatives and the current condition of certified organic farming:

This isn't what we meant. When we said organic we meant local, we meant healthful. We meant being true to the ecologies of regions. We meant mutually respectful growers and eaters. We meant social justice and equality. (quoted in Guthman, 2004: 172)

While the creation of internationally harmonized organic standards facilitates a neoliberal trade agenda that is currently heavily pursued by corporate and governmental organizations on a global scale, in the interest of ecological sustainability and social justice it might better be opposed. In moving a passion-driven alternative program for food production into very particular sorts of ruling relations, organic farming is altered, ordered and organized within this paradigm.

While grassroots organic farming movements are easily characterized as value-laden initiatives, a defining feature of the ruling relations of our time is their apparent attempt at value neutrality. Texts such as the IOIA manual and IOIA code of ethics mediate the work of verification officers to elicit ‘neutral’ accounts, detached from real embodied subjects but acting for them throughout social relations. Farmers who worked to initiate organic programs to foster the farming they deem more sustainable and just, are objectively documented in textual forms that serve to represent and verify their work through the sequential, abstracted relations that bring food from farms to consumers. From the standpoint of the organic farmer as knower and subject, institutional ethnography enables an inquiry that goes beyond various alternative convictions that drive any one farmer’s organic farming practices. Using this method I have explored their experiential realities to start to make sense of the ruling relations of organic certification programs, neither fully knowable nor understandable from a single embodied location.

As Karen and John spoke of their farms and the work they do it became apparent that the kind of farming they engage in is currently economically viable because they certify their farms. Due to the conditions surrounding ‘organic’ in BC and the nature of

these farmers' off-farm sales, without organic certification neither Karen nor John could afford to farm in the (costly, labour intensive and exemplary) ways that they do. While annual verification inspections of Karen's small grower operation tend to go smoothly, she explains that it is the land and not she herself that is certified and verified as organic. As a tenant farmer, if she were ever forced from her land to find a new uncertified plot Karen would also be forced to restart the costly three year certification process. Despite her long term commitment to organic farming and her considerable expertise, she would be required to sell uncertified and transitional produce during this transitional time period, a circumstance she would likely find difficult to afford. While John enjoys more security through owning his land, he feels the records he is expected to keep for his biodiverse farm are excessive and ironically, are decidedly more difficult to upkeep because of his biodiverse farming practices. Specifically, when a farmer incorporates livestock and many crop varieties on their land (or attempts self-sustainability, minimizes externalization of environmental costs and refuses to rely on commercially prepared inputs) the farm becomes especially challenging and time consuming to document for certification administration. Separate records are requisite for each component of the farm and the necessity of this comprehensive recordkeeping is backed by the quantitative, codified organic standards. The COABC defines organic farming as "an agricultural production system that *promotes and enhances* biological diversity... based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony" (COABC, 2007, my italics); yet farming *fewer* crop varieties or just livestock and *relying* on off-farm inputs – essentially taking a more 'conventional' approach to farming - make record keeping and

thus certified organic farming, more feasible. In implementing the certification of land based on challenging recordkeeping practices, institutionalized organic certification programs prioritize the organizational or administrative processes over the act of sustainable farming itself. In this instance, third party inspection processes (a growing trend used to monitor business and promote consumer trust in abstracted relations visually represented by labels on commodities) are facilitated at the expense of promoting and protecting the biodiversity farming that is not only directly definable as organic, but that research shows is most ecologically sustainable and most supportive of a lifestyle desired by organic farmers.

Mack's account revealed that, beyond the regulatory organic standards, the IOIA inspector's manual and its official code of ethics mediate a verification officer's work in the certification process. In turn these texts reconstitute the work of certified organic farmers. Guided by an understanding of these standardized publications, a verification officer's ability to do her job relies on the comprehensive records produced by farmers. These texts allow for farmers' work to be observed and documented in ruling relations. The time it takes to do an inspection is two hours and within this allotted time the verification officer must filter through an abundance of available information to attain the requisite information that is applicable to the creation of a 'factual' report for the certifying body. This report importantly represents the organic farm and farmer for the certifying board. It is integral to yearly verification of an organic farmer's certification and in turn, the farmer's ability to use the now much needed 'certified organic' label. Comparable to the work of a social worker deftly explicated by institutional ethnographer Gerald de Montigny (1995), the 'professional' authority displayed by a

verification officer such as Mack depends largely on his ability “to employ textual realities to mediate the details of their daily practice” (de Montigny, quoted in Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 209). Behind the distressing letter that informed farmer John “he did not take record keeping seriously” was this complex work process: a verification officer visited his farm, employed prerequisite knowledge of organic farming in the ways taught by the IOIA (mediated by the manual, code of ethics and COABC organic standards) and constructed the ‘factual’ account used by the board to assess and then ultimately conditionally verify certification of John’s farm based on a future improvement in recordkeeping.

While the farmer is the author of answers to questions put forth on the application form (a painstaking work process itself) the certification committee does not simply use this application to represent the farmer’s work. Rather, the primary purpose of the farmer-authored application is as a reference point from which the work of the verification officer can begin to expose discrepancies. Discrepancies between the verification officer’s observations of the farm and the organic standards, or discrepancies between the farmer’s application and the verification officer’s observations, act as triggers that can indicate a farmer’s non-compliance with organic standards to the certification board.

The verification officer’s report represents the work of the farmer for her certification assessment through “reported speech.” What the farmer actually says is “located inside professionally determined schemata” in a properly prepared, professional document (deMontigny, in Smith 1990: 99). In this way, the farmer loses subjectivity in the process. The abundance of information supplied to Mack by “chatty”

farmers - their contextually various motivations for farming in the ways they do, their alternative value schemas (Sumner, 2003), and their inspiring potential for opposing masculinist food ways (McMahon, 2001: 37) - are all part of the complexity of information that is sifted through by a verification officer during an inspection. This rich body of information, however, if not relevant to the report the verification officer creates becomes irrelevant to the organic certification itself. It is filtered out of the certification process, left out of official documents, and is inconsequential to the certification of the farm. In this process, each certified organic farm can be (is made to be) presented to consumers as equivalent to any other certified operation, equally represented by one homogenous 'organic' label.

The homogeneity of the organic label and the international harmonization of organic farming programs are, as Karen puts it, "interesting to think about." Last year, a travelling panel visited Vancouver Island to attain farmers' suggestions for and reactions to Canada's National Organic Program (NOP). They stopped at Karen's farm to attain her opinion on the nationally ratified certification program, which will come into effect December 2008. I too asked Karen to speak about the NOP, wondering specifically what the change might mean for her:

Katie: Who has the say now that there are [Canadian] National standards? I remember you describing how you would argue in the [IOPA] meetings over little details in the standards' wording. Can that still happen?

Karen: I think there's still allowance for some bioregional differences. Yeah, I think that the National standard is the lowest common denominator and then, bioregional certification bodies can add on to that. But yeah, I think it does lessen our control over what is organic, and what isn't.

Katie: How did the standards come about? Sort of an amalgamation then of all the bioregional standards?

Karen: Yeah sort of. Well there was this panel, this traveling panel and they actually came to my farm, which was hilarious because we're just [so small]. And they just asked me what I wanted out of a national regulation.

Katie: And what did you say?

Karen: [laughing] Well I said at the time that I feel that small hippies own the word organic and I'd hate to have it co-opted by big business. And so I would like them to protect the small farmer at all costs.

Katie: And so what would they do to protect the small hippie farmer, in your opinion?

Karen: Keep the standards really high. Don't allow big business – like the fertilizing methods, all the things that you have to do to keep your farm – like with our club root problem. If [club root] happened to a big farm it would be devastating because they would have specialized equipment for picking broccoli heads, wrapping them, washing them – all these kinds of things that are just for broccoli. If they had this disease, it would be terrible. So a big industry solution to that would be, ok well we can apply hydrolyzed lime if this happens. You know we don't want to have little 'way outs' for big and medium sized farms. You know, that said it would be nice to have more food in organic production. And I guess our standard has to reflect across the world.

Katie: Why?

Karen: For trade. That's the main reason the National Standards exist.

Katie: But I mean for you, as a small farmer, by what you've described, you are not about export...

Karen: No, not at all. But that's the reason these National regs are in. Like the Similcomene apple farmers that want to... export to Europe, and Europe won't take their apples unless they agree with a national standard. Is that what your understanding [of the reason for a Canadian national standard] is?

Katie: Yes. But then it follows that the reason the national standard would be happening at all is for these big business reasons. So what does a national standard do for small farming, or the hippies you speak of protecting, who started the movement, or for you personally?

Karen: I don't know. It will be interesting to see what happens.

Katie: Do you think things are working in your favour, or not, with the way things are going nationally?

Karen: I think, I guess not in my favour, personally.

Karen's account touches on two key issues surrounding recent harmonization of organic farming programs: 1) a small scale farmer embrace of organic integrity through "really high" standards and 2) a big business push toward international harmonization of "the

lowest common denominator” standards. The internationally harmonized organic standards, which are generally less stringent than many small scale producers would like, support multinational interests in organic markets and neoliberal trade agendas.

Neoliberalism is a “doctrine of laissez-faire capitalism” (Robinson, 2004: 77). A theory of political economic practices based on the assumption that human well-being is best achieved through liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms in a framework that protects private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005: 2).

Legitimated by suppositions of neoclassical theory, the neoliberal agenda “treats people as atomistic individuals who are bound together only through market forces” (Brohman, 1995: 297). Within this rubric is a default role of State governments that is pertinent but altered. Gone is the Keynesian Welfare State; now the task is to create and uphold a politic that lends itself to global free flow of capital. To achieve this, governments need to sustain monetary systems, devise and sanction legal structures and military that protects private property rights and the functioning of markets, and foster creation of markets where none yet exist. Beyond these responsibilities the State should not interfere. The doctrine contends that the free market will serve to meet human needs. Deregulation of business, privatization of public resources and common space, withdrawal of the State from areas of social and ecological welfare, and general reduction of public expenditure are prominent effects of neoliberalism (Hatt, 2005a). While the results of this political restructuring have thus far been detrimental, in particular for the Third World (Brohman, 1995), the process has generally occurred with common consent and in turn has cultivated that consent. Neoliberalism is hegemonic as a mode of discourse, “incorporated into the common sense way many of

us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005: 3).

Certified organic farming programs as a *market* answer to the social and ecological wrongdoings of conventional agriculture reproduce neoliberal forms and buy into hegemonizing tactics. Firstly they rest on the notion that entrepreneurialism and individual consumption can provide for health and environmental sustainability. According to neoliberal principles “the pursuit of self interest by individuals is the primary basis for the development of personal and social well being... [and] is the best basis for achieving the common good” (Hatt, 2005b: 1). A personal interest in protecting one’s health and immediate environment constitutes motivation for organic consumption that fosters a niche market. Privileged, informed and able consumers are armed to make better ‘organic’ purchase choices to protect their own health and safety (Raynolds, 2004). The onus, tellingly, is on the individual and the solution to the problem is for sale. Turning health and safety over to consumer choice instead of making it a public issue is as disturbing as it is exemplary of the neoliberal agenda at work. Fitting ecological sustainability and health into a system where consumers are required to pay a premium to obtain it is elitist (DeLind, 1993). It depends on the notion that it is acceptable to make public health and animal and ecological welfare a personal consumption option for those who can, or who choose to, afford it (Guthman, 2004a). Offering organic food in the way of a niche commodity fails to disrupt or displace the conventional product (Clunies Ross and Cox, 1994). Moreover, the marketing and purchasing of ‘organic’ for *health reasons alone* does not demand de-reification of the social and economic relations that bring food from farmers to consumers.

While Canada’s National Organic Program bolsters the growth of organic

markets, this support is for a particular variety of organic farming and is donned in specific forms. State ratified internationally harmonized organic standards generally fail to incorporate the requests of small scale farmers such as Karen and John who promote stricter or more process-oriented standards. National governments tend to support the formation of an 'organic' that is accessible to multinationals and privileged consumers, paving the way for international trade in organic produce and products that generally benefits core countries and often re-inscribes the same troublesome social/economic North/South relations of the conventional food system (Raynolds, 2004). In so doing States abet to strip organic from local control.

To negotiate their movement through this neoliberal terrain organic farmers necessarily employ particular discourses to gain access to funding, markets, political clout and institutionalization. With this process it has been suggested that organic farming becomes subjected to new forms of State governance that emerged with neoliberalism. New forms of governance contend that institutions are responsible for meeting objectives and that good performance is rewarded by incentives while bad performance is punished by sanctions. The good are separated from the bad in a highly competitive, levelled market playing field not unlike the masculinist rubric of the conventional food system. To legitimate organic within this framework farmers are want to make scientific claims that emphasize the health benefits of products, to prove the productivity of their type of farming and to highlight their entrepreneurial promise or success. The growing merger between 'organic' and health that seems particularly pertinent to organic branding and marketing on the corporate level may be happening at the expense of the social and ecological issues that seem left in its wake. These efforts

can bury organic farming in hegemonic discourses rather than define it in opposition (Allen and Guthman, 2006).

The organic standards and certification procedures promote corporate accountability to consumers rather than government responsibility to citizens, and especially to organic farmers themselves. This neoliberal trend is evidenced by the use of third party verification officers to regulate organic produce and products. Transparency and surveillance have become “the name of the game... broad and substantive public regulations are shunned for ‘the culture of the audit,’ corporate responsibility, and individual consumption choice’ ” (Guthman, 2007: 263). While third party inspections are meant to uphold organic integrity and bring transparency to the certification programs, these inspections are done by private certifying agencies that are in turn subject to their own needs for economic viability and textually organized relations that can administrate standardized and accountable work processes. Thus the work of organic farmers is extra-locally shaped by this third party’s time constraints, objective documentation procedures, demands for recordkeeping and so forth: most of which have little to do with the actual act of growing good food. Through these textually mediated processes marketplace dynamics extend into organic farming programs with the tendency to manoeuvre them in the direction of valorizing efficiency, maximizing productivity, and seeking profit not without cost.

The shift in organic standards from the educational tool of the past to the key facilitator of certification programs jives with multinational trade regimes but may be in discordance with ideals expressed by grassroots initiators. International harmonization of organic standards serves to integrate State programs for purposes of transnational

trade. Notably, neoliberal States do not tend to bring forth or defend legislation to protect public health and environmental sustainability, but rather provide for the growth and protection of the markets to address these vital realms. Within the global free market, responding to issues of social justice and ecological sustainability is a private rather than public function. Thus organic farming becomes a “progenitor of a neoliberal anti-politics that devolves regulatory responsibility to consumers via their dietary choices” (Guthman, 2007: 264). The heavily promoted State supported growth in international trade of organic foodstuffs is couched in a hegemonic discourse of progress: a dialogue that speaks to the notion that multinationals going organic provides the answer to issues of sustainable food production, or at very least (so as to make it difficult to argue with) puts more acreage into pesticide-reduced production.

Global capitalist dynamics and the literal workings of institutionalized relations have fostered certified organic programs that are detached from many of the grassroots movements’ ideals, most prominently in regards to social justice aspirations. While restricting chemical inputs improves conditions for farm workers by radically reducing their exposure to pesticides, the placement of organic farming in a highly competitive profit driven global market also means minimizing labour expenditures and fostering the most profitable kind of trade relations. In California, for example, organic farming tends to make use of the same underpaid racialized labour sources as the conventional food system (Guthman, 2004a). Tapping into State sponsored programs for subsidized labour forces, organic farmers have come to depend on the social dimensions of cheap labour along with the ecological dimensions of intensified production (paraphrase Guthman: 177). In Latin America, for example, “over 80% of [the] organic output is

exported, reproducing the region's historical dependence on agro-export markets and vulnerability to global market fluctuations" (Raynolds, 2004). By failing to address the social justice issues involved with farm labour practices, and with increased distance between producers and consumers and South-North trade dependency, certified organic farming aligns with a neoliberal agenda that has the detrimental effect of "exacerbating the polarization of society in all of its dimensions" (Barken, 2000:164).

### **How do we Grow from Here?**

Concern with future directions for organic farming movement initiatives is not with the intentions that guide certified organic farming, but rather with what has become the institutionalized method for getting there. A *consumer-led* market for organic commodities simply does not get at the radical potential for social and ecological justice that farmers' grassroots initiatives have sought. Neoliberal forms reproduced through certified organic programs are irrespective of many who initiated the movement; but the integrity of the initiators does not assuage a persisting anxiety over the realization that globalizing capitalism and sustainability are fundamentally at odds with each other (Foster, 2002). Radical agro ecology involves addressing how accumulation of wealth creates poverty and rests on the domination and exploitation of people, other living things and their environments. Sustainability involves attending to current systemic social-economic injustices including the growing gap between rich and poor, underpaid racist and sexist labour sources and exploitation of the Third World for the sake of the First.

Within the realm of sustainable development, solutions to poverty and ecological

degradation are all too often sought through fragmented market-led programs despite the reality that, as economist David Barkin (2000) emphasizes, “a market-driven strategy will not bridge the chasm between rich and poor” (165). This may also be the case for organic farming. As the social movement initiatives become increasingly conducive to multinational corporate interests, the small scale farmers whose farming practices are the most sustainable and socially just (and whose very participation forged the way for an organic market) risk being forced from the business to make way for the profit of multinational corporations. New approaches to agro ecology are required, and decidedly the solutions demand more than a consumer-led alternative for people privileged enough to be customers within relations of inequality upheld by the productivity and poverty of the masses.

Barkin (2000) critiques neoliberal economic development models and delineates three fundamental principles of sustainability that are correspondingly applicable to address the current condition of certified organic farming and potential alternative directions for agro ecological movements. First, for Barkin sustainability “is about the struggle for diversity in all its dimensions” (168), and diversity is an interconnected social and ecological justice issue. Organic farming set out to promote such diversity in biodiversity food production, in diversifying who farms and in creating space for women and small scale growers in spite of a masculinist productivist conventional system (McMahon 2004; Warren, 2000). Yet along with the evolution of certified organic farming programs, opportunities for small farmers and the biodiversity of farms are both put at risk, meaning the potential for the institution to promote real sustainability is stifled.

Second Barkin (2000) states that sustainability “is a process rather than a set of well specified goals. It involves modifying human relations with nature, the economy and society” (168). Organic farming began with such a focus on process, and indeed the definitions for organic farming programs still tend to refer to the creation of sustainable ecological processes (COABC, 2007). Yet because these definitions are tagged to a set of quantifiable codified standards concerned primarily with regulated inputs, and as I have shown here, because organic certification is upheld entirely by a particular sort of perception of a farmer’s compliance with these documents, the focus on process is lost in the regulatory regime. In short the holistic processes behind farming organically are rendered inconsequential through the institutionalized work of ruling them.

Finally Barkin contends that “a strategy to promote sustainability must focus on the importance of local participation and control over the way in which people live and work in the world” (168). He asserts: “Sustainability is about direct participation. If there is one constant in the diverse literature in the area, it is the recognition that the movement has emerged from the grassroots... There is generalized agreement among practitioners that sustainable development policies cannot be designed or implemented from above. To be successful they require the direct participation of the intended beneficiaries and others who might be impacted” (170). Organic farming indeed emerged under such local control in grassroots movements; the initial programs for organic farming were contextual, farmer derived and enacted under regional management in communities. Yet looking closer, organic farming programs were created in the geographic North and were never under the control of Southern producers (Raynolds, 2004). And while the original impetus was for locally oriented products and

not export, as organic certification programs were institutionalized in the North control has moved from the hands of small scale farmers to accommodate big business interests with global trade agendas. In both hemispheres new initiatives need to reassert autonomy to gain public control over forms of food production and distribution.

Localized autonomous food systems offer incredible potential to reformulate agro ecology beyond the confines of certified organic programs. This institutional ethnography of certified organic farming on Vancouver Island unearths limitations of institutionalized certification programs as the solution to perceived harms of the conventional food system. Shortcomings of 'certified organic' are essentially the backbone for a growing and widely felt concern over the future direction of the movement and the emergence of new agro ecology alternatives to the organic alternative itself.

These beginnings of an explicatory institutional map of organic certification in BC make apparent that problems lie not in the integrity or motivations of farmers or their customers, or in the goals or even future potential of the movement, but rather in the particular way the program for 'certified organic' is devised and implemented and the particular properties of the ruling relations it relies on. Consequently the term 'organic' itself is reduced to mean only what these institutionalized programs are able to yield and represent. Due to this reduction 'organic' has come to stand for a farmer's ability to meet a legally codified quantitative list of 'allowed,' 'regulated' and 'disallowed' inputs. In turn, a farmer's certification depends on an ability to adhere to potentially onerous administrative requirements, to withstand routine inspections and to overcome any entry barriers to certification including barriers to obtaining certifiable land within a

pre-existing expensive land market.

Organic labels and third party certification to verify the processes behind the labels are “market mechanisms favoured in a neoliberal political climate precisely because they favour business as usual” (Guthman 179) and not because they are the best way for farming movements to reach their ecological and social justice goals.

Consequently, organic farming has come to share many forms characteristic of institutions in contemporary modernity and has come to facilitate the neoliberal agenda, a form that does not lend itself to sweeping changes to our food system. This is why organic can sit benignly on shelf beside its conventional counterpart (Clunies Ross and Cox, 1994). Ecologically unjust, socially unjust, animal rights violating, unhealthy and completely *legal* forms of food production and distribution persist whilst ‘organic’ provides the alternative commodity. ‘Organic’ as such is a certain variety of ‘better choice’ for those privileged enough to have access while a system overhaul remains in demand.

Institutional ethnography is sociology for people, a method that provides a way to see precisely how counter-hegemonic values and activism can be stifled with standardized institutionalization. It offers a grasp of ruling relations that is not immediately attainable from the local experience. With institutionalization certified organic farming no longer functions as a social movement (Kaltoft, 2001) and while the result has not been entirely unsatisfactory, this research makes apparent that institutionalization has altered the act of organic farming itself as it is organized through ruling relations of contemporary modernity. Certified organic farming is extra-locally coordinated via textual mediation at local sites in the interests of those who rule. As

power shifts from the grassroots initiators – from the farmers themselves - to government and administration with particular agendas in place, and as processes of organization and regulation take precedence over sustainability and justice, it is important that we use this tool to critique the interests reflected and enacted with institutionalization, to assess what these interests mean for the possibility of sustainable and just farming, and to collectively forge on from here.

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## Renewal Application for IOPA Organic Certification

Appendix A

Check all boxes that apply - Please include information on additional paper as necessary

### A. Contact information

IOPA producer number:

Farm address if different:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

### B. Certification information

Status: Certified organic (June 04 – June 05)

Status for: Poultry: yes Other livestock: yes Processing: n

Certified since: 1994

Seeking IOPA 05 status for:  crops  poultry/poultry products  (other) livestock  processing/handling

New or replacement certificates produced only as necessary.

I do not require a new certificate, only a renewal sticker.

I require a new/replacement certificate. (They are very costly for IOPA to produce.) Legibly print the applicant name, producer name (if different than above) and products as you would like them to appear on your certificate:

### C. Producer information

#### 1. Crops

Total certified organic acres (transitional acres): 30

What are you seeking certification for? Vegetables  fruit  seeds  herbs  bedding plants   
greenhouse crops  flowers  nuts  other  please list:

Submit appropriate application and forms

#### 2. Animals and/or animal products: give numbers of each type

What are you seeking certification for? Cows  sheep  goats  horses  hogs

chickens  other - please list:

dairy  meat  wool  eggs  other  please list:

Submit appropriate application and forms.

#### 3. Type of processing:

Simple, small-scale processing (such as drying or freezing) of farm-grown products for personal use or later sale. (Processing forms are not required but familiarize yourself with COABC minimum standards. Note: where appropriate product can be promoted as containing CO ingredients, but the processed product itself cannot be promoted as certified organic.)

Processing of products from off-farm or medium- to large-scale processing.

Submit appropriate application and forms.

### D. Additional general information

1. Is all commercial production under your control in the certification programme?  yes  no If no, please review IOPA rule C(2) and provide details.

2. Have there been significant events or changes to your operation from last year? (E.g., site contamination, new neighbour, buildings, land)  no  yes If yes, provide details as appropriate.

3. Everyone with control over the organic management area is an applicant or has submitted a declaration stating they understand and will respect IOPA/COABC rules yes  no  If no, give details, and provide a signed and witnessed statement. Note: All applicants and principle operators should be present during the VO visit.

**E. Additional information for COABC****Appendix A**

COABC website listing

- Contact, status, summary of crops grown and size of organic/transitional acreage  
 Contact and status information only  
 Do not list any information

My own web-page. Send the following directly to COABC (3402 32nd Ave, Vernon BC V1T 2N1): 2 good quality 4x6 photos, 250 words or less of typewritten text, cheque or money order for \$53.50 and a stamped self-addressed envelope if you want the photos returned. \$25.00 annual fee should be sent in following years to maintain page and allow for minor changes.

**Declaration**

I/We \_\_\_\_\_ [applicant name(s)] hereby swear or affirm that this application and all supporting materials are a true and accurate representations of my/our organic enterprise. **I/We further agree** to review and abide by the guidelines and standards of IOPA and COABC, as amended. In addition, **I/We further agree** that we will do nothing to falsely represent products as organic, or as certified organic. **I/We further agree** that IOPA certification committee members or IOPA-assigned Verification Officers will have reasonable access to our farm, production areas, records and documents.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of producer(s)\_\_\_\_\_  
Date**2005 Renewal application information**

**Application deadline for renewing producers: February 5, 2005** Note: \$50 per month or part month for late applications must be included. *Except in unusual circumstances, no applications will be accepted after May 1, 2004*  
**Application specifications:** 3 complete copies are required. Each must be collated, stapled and on 8.5 and 11 sized paper only. Incomplete applications will be returned or producer charged \$20 per hour or part hour for irregular processing.

**Send to:** 3905 D Cadboro Bay Rd., Victoria BC V8N 4G3

**Fees:** IOPA fees + COABC fees. Write **ONE** cheque to cover **BOTH** fees.

**IOPA:** Producer renewal fee: **\$285** (This is the total, includes membership fee and basic VO costs).

**COABC:**

Category	Gross Organic Sales	COABC fee including GST	Category	Gross organic sales	COABC fee including GST
1	< 10K	\$ 76.61	9	80K - 90K	\$ 312.01
2	10K - 20K	\$ 106.04	10	90K - 100K	\$ 341.44
3	20K - 30K	\$ 135.46	11	100K - 125K	\$ 370.86
4	30K - 40K	\$ 164.89	12	125K - 150K	\$ 400.29
5	40K - 50K	\$ 194.31	13	150K - 175K	\$ 429.71
6	50K - 60K	\$ 223.74	14	175K - 200K	\$ 459.14
7	60K - 70K	\$ 253.16	15	200K - 300K	\$ 517.99
8	70K - 80K	\$ 282.59	16	300 - 400K	\$576.84

**Checklist** for renewal application**Required**

- IOPA & COABC fee paid in full (one cheque)  
 This form: complete, signed and dated.  
 Crop renewal form  
 Farm map  
 Crop rotation update (COABC 4.2)  
 Input records  
 Audit control summary of organic production  
 Regulated practices/materials form

**Optional, or as appropriate**

- Directions for VO if not on file: one copy  
 Poultry application and forms  
 Processing/handling application and forms  
 Livestock slaughter/dairy application and forms  
 Update on removal of chemically-treated wood

Please keep a copy of this application for your records.

Appendix A

Audit Control Summary of Certified Organic Poultry Products Sold from Jan 1  
(or attach copy of Audit Control Summary sheet)

Organic Products	Actual Production	Production Sold	Production Left to Sell
EGGS			
BR./CHICKENS			

I have reviewed my Organic Poultry Plan Questionnaire and verified it to be accurate. Yes  No   
Check the following categories where changes have been made:

- \$2 Operation Profile
- \$3 Source of Animals
- \$4 A. Source of Feed  B. Feed Supplements  C. Feed Storage
- \$5 Water
- \$6 Housing
- \$7 Health Management  A. General  B. Disease/Health Problems   
C. Fly Control  D. Parasites  E. Predators  F. Surgical
- \$8 Manure Management
- \$9 Slaughter  PORTABLE SLAUGHTER FACILITY CAME TO FARM
- \$10 Egg Handling
- \$11 Animal Identification
- \$12 Record keeping  SEE REFERENCE ON OTHER SIDE
- \$13 Marketing
- \$14 Certification Services

On a separate sheet, give complete details of changes.

Include with your application:

- an up to date copy of your Pasture/Outdoor Area History Sheet, and
- a copy of your livestock inputs Record Form for the past twelve months

I/we, \_\_\_\_\_, operating under the farm name of \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby affirm that all information supplied is true and accurate. I affirm my commitment to abide by IOPA and COABC Organic Standards. No prohibited products, including genetically engineered products, have been used, applied, or otherwise allowed to compromise the integrity of the organic products produced or sold by me. I understand the failure to follow the Organic Standards or giving false information may result in the de-certification of my operation. I further understand that the operation may be subject to unannounced inspection and/or sampling for residues at any time.

Signature of Operator \_\_\_\_\_

Farm Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Operator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Renewal Application for Organic Certification of Crops

Appendix A

Check all boxes that apply  
Please include information on additional paper as necessary

### A. General, Land and Resource Management (COABC s. 2 and 3)

**1. Environmental protection/stewardship.** Please provide a summary of any efforts towards environmental protection, stewardship or indigenous plant restoration on your farm:

MAINTAINED GARRY OAK & BENTLEY STANES  
POND AREA Bush Suckland; Home to WILD LIFE  
GROW 1/2 ACRE OF RED FIFE HERITAGE WHEAT  
get 630 lbs of grain FOR SEED BREAD for WILDFIRE BAKERY

### 2. Enterprise records and Audit Trail (COABC 2.6 and 3.2)

- Requirements reviewed: COABC 2.6.3 and 3.2
- Input records included. (This is a record of purchases etc. of agricultural products used for your organic enterprise.)
- Regulated Materials Use form included.

### 3. Compost (COABC 3.10)

- No prohibited materials in compost
  - Written documentation kept for sources of off-farm materials used in on-farm composting activities;
  - Temperature of compost monitored;
  - Any purchased compost is OMRI approved or list of ingredients obtained and included;
  - Covered in rainy months;
  - No fish farm waste used. If  yes, note it is regulated, see IOPA C(6);
- Amount in yards of finished compost made on farm 150; purchased: 18+45.

### B. Crop Management (COABC Section 4)

#### 1. Crop Rotation

- Crop rotation plan maintained for all annual, biennial or arable field crops;
- Update included;
- Perennial crops: records kept for efforts to improve soil quality.

#### 2. Propagation

- No non-organic annual transplants;
- Non-organic perennial transplants, if used, not sold as organic for 12 months;
- No seeds treated with synthetic pesticides, No GMO seeds or GE inoculants.

#### 3. Weed Control

- No plastic mulch used. If yes  note it is regulated, see COABC s. 4.5 and 2.2 and provide details.

## Appendix A

## 4. Water

Source(s) for irrigation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Source(s) for washing/processing: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of last water test \_\_\_\_\_

MUNICIPAL  
 " "  
 " "

**C. Post-harvest handling, packaging, storage (COABC section 11)**

Please see COABC standards and detail practices or pertinent changes below as necessary.

HAVE 2 LARGE SPIN DRYERS FOR SALAD & GREENS  
 ALLOWING US TO SPIN DRY 100LB SALAD AT A TIME.

**D. Certification Committee and Verification Officer comments/requirements**

- 2004 CC letter and VO report reviewed.  
 Certification committee requirements, if any, have been met.

**Important:** describe what you have done to address the concerns of the certification committee and verification officer last year.

ALL SEEDING IS RECORDED  
 ALL GREEN HOUSES HAVE A PLANTING CHART FOR EACH BED  
 WITH TRANSPLANTED DATES & CROPS & HARVESTING DATES  
 WE HAVE A VERY COMPLEX & DIVERSE OPERATION IN KEEPING  
 WITH OUR AIM FOR THE DIVERSIFIED, SUSTAINABLE SMALL FAMIL  
 FARM. WE HOPE THE C.C. WILL FORGIVE OUR SHORTCOMINGS AND  
 ALL ARE WELCOME TO COME TO OUR FARM & GIVE US INPUT ANYTIME.  
 PIC AREA HAS BEEN WEEDED AND BEEN LEFT FALLOW FOR 15 MONTHS.

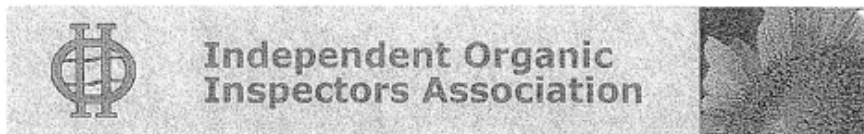
**E. Other**

Have you successfully used any new techniques for weed, insect, pest or disease control? Please provide any information you would like to share with other IOPA producers.

WE HAD AN INFESTATION OF CRANE FLY LARVAE IN GREENHOUSE  
 #11. WE TRIED BENEFICIAL NEMATODES, THEN BT WITHOUT BENEFIT.  
 WE THEN BROUGHT 30 LAYING CHICKENS IN FOR 1 WEEK AND  
 THEY TOOK CARE OF THE PROBLEM. WE THEN SOWED BUCKWHEAT  
 AND LATER TILLED IT IN.

Please keep a copy of this application for your records

## Appendix B



### Ethics

All IOIA inspector members agree to abide by IOIA's Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct as part of their membership. IOIA also has an Ethics Committee and a complaint procedure for investigating possible violations of these codes.

### Complaint Query

#### IOIA CODE OF ETHICS

1. Inspectors agree to abide by IOIA Bylaws, Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct and honor all confidentiality agreements pertaining to their work as organic inspectors.
2. Inspectors support and encourage the development, implementation and advancement of organic agriculture and processing.
3. Inspectors may also be members of, employees of, and/or certified by, regional, federal, or international certification bodies, but shall maintain a clear separation of the inspection from certification decision-making.
4. While performing in the professional capacity of an organic inspector or representing IOIA, inspectors shall be fair and impartial regarding various certification programs, provided that such programs meet minimum federal, state, provincial, or international organic standards.
5. Inspectors shall avoid situations of conflict of interest.
6. Inspectors shall refuse work which obliges them to make final decisions (as opposed to recommendations).
7. Inspectors should develop and upgrade their qualifications and competencies in accordance with IOIA accreditation standards and procedures. Inspectors must have a sound working knowledge of the policies, regulations and standards of all applicable certifying bodies and regulatory agencies.
8. Inspectors should be sensitive to the social, political, and environmental variables of the region when inspecting.
9. Inspectors should maintain the highest possible standards of inspector integrity. They have the responsibility to report suspected fraud, pertaining to their work as organic inspectors, to the appropriate authorities.

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#### IOIA CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Inspectors shall make available to inspected parties, upon request, copies of signed confidentiality agreements, the IOIA Code of Ethics, and IOIA Code of Conduct. Inspectors shall abide by confidentiality agreements with all certifying bodies for which they conduct inspections. All proprietary information is to be held in strict confidence.
2. Association Mission Statement: The mission of the Independent Organic Inspectors (IOIA) is to address issues and concerns relevant to organic inspectors, to provide quality inspector training, and to promote consistency and integrity in the organic certification process.
3. Inspectors may offer their experience and insights by serving on various industry boards or committees, but inspectors shall not make final decisions pertaining to the certification status of operations they inspect.
4. Inspectors are encouraged to foster goodwill and cooperation in the organic industry.
5. Regarding conflict of interest, inspectors:
  - a. shall not have had any financial/consulting relationship with the inspected party during the year prior to and the year following inspection.
  - b. shall not inspect close associates or competitors.
  - c. shall not receive any remuneration as a result of information gained or shared during the inspection.
  - d. shall not solicit work directly from inspected parties. Inspections are to be conducted only if authorized by certifying bodies.
  - e. may purchase goods from inspected parties, but these purchases are to be done solely for personal use and not for resale, and must not impinge on the professional relationship.
  - f. shall politely refuse gifts, subject to local culture.
6. Inspection reports should be accurate, thorough, and assess compliance with applicable standards of the certification body. Inspection reports in and of themselves do not constitute certification.
7. Inspectors should refuse work which is beyond their realm of competence. Inspectors shall work individually and collectively to provide professional upgrading and excellence. Inspectors should follow a "2 defect" guideline when considering accepting work in foreign lands. This means that out of the variables of language, cultural practices, and crops, the inspector should be competent in at least 2 of the 3 variables.
8. In preparing for inspections, inspectors should obtain certification committee summaries from the previous year. Any past recommendations, conditions and controversial issues should be thoroughly investigated during the inspection process.

Inspectors should keep in mind that they are the eyes, ears, and nose of the consumer. At all times during the inspection, they should be thorough, courteous, knowledgeable, honest and open-minded.

Revised: 2/28/2001

## Appendix C

### IOPA VO Checklist

Name of VO:  
 Farm name:  
 Time and date of inspection:

#### A. Background or general farm description

#### B. Land and Resource Management (COABC Section 3)

##### 3.1 Environmental Protection Note: IOPA rule C(1)

##### 3.2 Audit trail

##### 3.3 Transition rules Note: IOPA Split-operation rule, C(2)

##### 3.4 Boundaries

##### 3.5 Buffer Zones

##### 3.6. Fences, trellises and buildings Note: IOPA rule C(3) Note: COABC rule 5.1.3 re. greenhouses

##### 3.7 Organic Soil Management Note: IOPA rule C(5)

##### 3.8 Tillage

##### 3.9 Manure Management

##### 3.10 Compost 3.11 Soil fertility

#### C. Organic Crop Management (COABC Section 4)

##### 4.1 Genetic Engineering

##### 4.2 Crop Rotations

##### 4.3 Plant Propagation

##### 4.4 Irrigation Practices and Water quality

##### 4.5 Weed Control

##### 4.6 Insect and Pest Control

##### 4.7 Disease Control

##### 4.8 Pre and Post-harvest Handling

#### D. Other

##### 1. Review of Inputs:

##### 2. Past issues raised by VO or CC

##### 3. Summary, additional information

**Appendix C****Organic Livestock Management Standards (COABC section 8)****8.1 Feed****8.2 Feed supplements****8.3 Living Conditions**  
Note IOFA guidelines section A(IV)**8.4 Source of Breeding Stock****8.5 Source of Slaughter Stock****8.6 General Health and Sanitation Practices****8.7 Parasite Control****8.8 Other Management Practices****8.9 Record Keeping and Audit Trail****8.10 Milk Handling**



**Organic Poultry and Fowl Production (COABC Section 8)**  
Note: IOPA guidelines C(4)

**Appendix C**

**9.1 Feed**

**9.2 Feed Supplements**

**9.3 Housing and Living Conditions**

**9.4 Source of Stock Meat Birds**  
Note IOPA guidelines section A(IV)

**9.5 Source of Stock – Laying and Breeding Birds**  
Note IOPA guidelines section A(IV)

**9.6 Health and Sanitation Practices**  
Note IOPA guidelines C(4) [debeaking prohibited]

**9.7 Dead Bird disposal**

**9.8 Record keeping and audit trail**

**9.9 Other Management Practices**

**9.10 Slaughter and Processing**