



Fruit Crops Suited for Organic Production in Saskatchewan



by **Forrest Scharf and Chantal Stumborg**
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Native fruit species are naturally selected to grow in Saskatchewan. However, since they have thrived here for millennia, pests have also evolved to take advantage of these species and this makes it difficult to grow them organically.

The native fruit with the greatest commercial crop production in the province is the saskatoon berry. Saskatoons are susceptible to diseases like entomosporium leaf and berry spot which can have a very negative effect on berry production. In 2005, roughly 50 per cent of the expected provincial yield was lost due to this disease.

Saskatoons can also suffer insect damage from saskatoon bud moth, saskatoon sawfly, apple curculio and woolly elm aphid, among others. In order to manage insect and disease pests, most growers are forced to spray their orchards with pesticides.

In contrast to the somewhat lengthy list of insects and diseases that afflict saskatoons and other native species, new Saskatchewan commercial fruit crops like apple (*Malus domestica*), haskap (*Lonicera caerulea* L.), and University of Saskatchewan dwarf sour cherries (*Prunus fruticosa* x *Prunus cerasus* hybrids), are relatively pest free. They are well adapted to our prairie environment, and require little to no pesticide application to ensure good production. Although some fertilization is generally recommended to maximize fruit yield, the nutrient needs of these fruit species could easily be met via organic fertilizers. This makes them ideal for organic production. In fact, apples and dwarf sour cherries have registered organic control products that are available for use by growers (largely because the organic control products were demanded in other Canadian growing regions).

There are several different certification agencies that an organic fruit grower can choose to use. Each has a unique way of approaching certification, and growers are encouraged to contact each certifier and talk to other organic growers prior to choosing one.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Contact Forrest Scharf, Provincial Specialist, Fruit Crops at (306) 787-4666 or;
- Chantal Stumborg, Provincial Specialist, Organic Crop Production at (306) 798-0945.

ORGANIC FIELD DAY OFFERS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE



by **Daphne Gottselig**
Agrologist Intern
Agriculture Knowledge Centre

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Scott Research Farm is hosting an organic field day on July 24th, 2008 at Scott, SK, which will include an in-depth tour of organic research projects on the farm. AAFC Scott Research Farm is an innovative research site for many organic agriculture studies.

The organic field day will include an update on an alternative cropping systems study which compares high-input systems to organic systems, and the economic, weed population and soil health impacts of various rotation options. This study is a long-term project spanning 14 years, which involves many AAFC researchers.

Do you have persistent perennials that just won't go away? If so, come check out Eric Johnson's talk on biological controls and organic options for Canada thistle and leafy spurge, as well as mechanical methods to control weeds. A presentation on alternative seed treatments that may be used in future organic production will be lead by Sherrilyn Phelps with Saskatchewan's Ministry of Agriculture.

Diane Knight with the University of Saskatchewan will discuss the use of soil amendments such as alfalfa pellets, wood ash, composted manure, rock phosphate, JumpStart® and MykePro® for their value and effectiveness at providing nutrients to crops.

Intercropping is shown to reduce disease, insect and weed pressures. At the intercropping demonstration trial, Joanne Thiessen-Martens with the University of Manitoba will discuss the agronomic and market prospects for various intercrop options. Steve Shirliffe with the University of Saskatchewan will provide information on organic agronomic practices, green manure choices and termination methods, which features the crimper roller. Other stops along the tour include new crops for organic production in Saskatchewan such as heritage wheat, camelina, fenugreek, prairie carnation and others.

To register please contact the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Contact Sherrilyn Phelps, Crops Agrologist with Saskatchewan Agriculture at (306) 446-7475.

BRUNO CHERRY FESTIVAL

The sixth annual Bruno Cherry Festival will occur this year on July 26 and 27. The community of Bruno hosts the festival and it is located approximately 50 minutes east of Saskatoon and just north of Highway #5 (which connects to Humboldt). The cherry festival occurs on the grounds of the former Prairie Ursuline Centre located along the northern perimeter of town.

The centre was originally built as a convent in 1919. It became the St. Ursuline Academy in 1922, and earned a reputation for excellence in academics and cultural education.

The University of Saskatchewan took over management of the facility in late 1999 with the intent of running it as an extension-based Conference facility. The centre sits on 65 acres of land and in 2000 the university canvassed its research community to find out if anyone could make good use of the land. Dr. Bob Bors determined that some of the grounds would be suitable for the establishment of dwarf sour cherry research plots. The cherries planted in the ensuing years also sparked the development of the Cherry Festival. Bruce Hobin from the University of Saskatchewan's Extension Division along with many community volunteers provided the impetus to make the festival one of the province's

unique summer cultural events. The university no longer holds the lease for the centre and the St. Ursuline Sisters have sold the facility to a community group that plan to run it as the "St. Therese School of Faith and Mission". However, the cherries are thriving on the property and the festival continues with the support of the local community.

The festival traditionally features a cherry pit spitting challenge; horse and wagon rides; childrens' shows; a corn maze; seminars; workshops; a small trade show; orchard tours; food delicacies (many featuring cherries); and a festival tent where live entertainers are featured.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Visit www.carltontrailagsociety.ca/index.htm;
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