

GREEN PARTY OF PEI

Agriculture Plank – May 2007

Our conversion from agrarian, local and fully integrated food systems to industrialized, monocultured agricultural production has brought a staggering number of side effects, many of them unanticipated. It has become evident here in PEI, and around the world, that many of our more urgent environmental problems are the direct result of our food production system.

Our drinking water is polluted with chemical fertilizer and it is unknown just how polluted it may be with pesticides. We inhale a cocktail of cancer-causing pesticides during spray season. Depleted of organic matter, our soil is eroding away faster than it can be replaced. One Agriculture Canada scientist warned that if we did not care for our soil, this Island would be incapable of supporting agriculture in 30 years.

Industrial agriculture has taken its toll on community and culture. Once an Island of thriving rural local economies, PEI is now largely urban with rural residents commuting to the cities for employment, young people moving away, and farmland mainly consolidated under large producers beholden to corporations like the Irvings for their markets.

Rural jobs largely disappeared as farms grew and consolidated, machines supplying cheap labour, and crop diversity reduced to commodities. But now, more than ever, Islanders are making the connections between the industrial food production and environmental and social havoc. More of us are eating organic than ever before and organic food production is the fastest growing sector of Canadian food production today.

Organic agriculture is commercially practiced in 120 countries and represented a \$40 billion market in 2006. Officials with the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, stated last month that, "a shift to organic agriculture could be beneficial," and that organic agriculture could produce enough food per capita to feed the world's current population.

We find ourselves in the midst of an historic confrontation between two very different visions of the future of food in the 21st Century. A grassroots public movement for organic, humane and ecological food is now challenging the half-century long monopoly of the corporate industrial model.

Cuba met this challenge head on and demonstrated that organic agriculture can bring about ecological and economic benefits in a socially equitable manner. This small Island nation is a model and a beacon of hope for all countries. It has been shown in Cuba and elsewhere that small farms are actually more productive than large ones – by as much as 200 to 1,000 percent greater output per unit of area.

The Green Party of PEI envisions a culture and an agriculture for PEI that is local, family-scale and fully integrated with the diversity of Nature. In a world with increasingly expensive fossil fuel, we need to attain food security for Islanders. At least 80% of what we eat is imported. If we fail to move to organic agriculture, it will eventually be forced upon us with no time to make

an orderly transition. The Okanagan Valley is an example of a region re-inventing itself as a producer of organic locally crafted specialty foods. More jobs in the agriculture sector are complimented by increased tourism driven by organic food production.

And so, a Green Party government would make the following proposals:

- PEI will commit to becoming 100% organic as quickly as possible, taking into account issues of toxic chemical trespass and the resulting damage to human health, organic crops and the environment
- the Department of Agriculture will shift focus from industrial food production to organic food production; experienced organic extension agents will be employed.
- toxic chemical taxes are applied to chemical pesticides
- pollution taxes are applied to chemical fertilizer
- property taxes are raised to reflect the loss of topsoil on industrial farmland
- all subsidies to industrial agriculture will end within one year
- government will have a procurement policy of “organic and local” first
- funding is available to enable income support during transition from chemical to organic agriculture
- tax incentives and subsidies are available to build small food processing facilities
- funding is available for training organic agriculture, including apprenticeships off-Island if necessary
- funding will enable Holland College and the Culinary Institute to offer instruction and apprenticeship in handcrafted food processing, such as cheese, wine and bread making
- urban agriculture be promoted to encourage food security as well as supplemental income
- farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture are supported
- the Experimental Farm is acquired and used for community gardens especially for low-income Islanders, a demonstration site for urban agriculture, an educational facility for healthy cooking, and working gardens to supply food for the Food Bank and other charitable organizations. Students will be employed and trained in organic food production.
- community gardens are established in every Island community so that all Islanders have access to fertile land to grow food.
- an experimental farm is established in rural PEI for organic crop research
- tax incentives are available to allow young people to purchase land to farm organically
- established organic growers have access to interest-free loans and other incentives to encourage expansion to family-farm size operations.
- tourism advertising is shifted to favour food-oriented holidays
- all children receive schooling in growing, cooking, preserving and processing food
- an apprenticeship program is established where apprentices will receive a stipend during training
- marketing boards will have no jurisdiction over small organic farm production
- highly productive agricultural land will be protected from development

As the scale of industrial agriculture increases, so too does its scale of abuses. Emerging from the destruction is a vision the Green party holds of a food future that is healthy, humane and sustainable. A food future that has the potential to revitalize rural communities as well as the Prince Edward Island economy.