



# 2023-24

ANNUAL REPORT

  
ORGANIC BC

# A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

I've been a member of the Organic BC Board off and on for around a decade, but 2023 marked the start of my first stint on the board's Executive Committee, which has given me a much clearer understanding of the outsized impact that Organic BC makes within and beyond the organic farming sector. A typical monthly update from our tireless Executive Director, Eva-Lena Lang, highlights progress on a dizzying number of projects, files, and relationships.

In this era of recurring shocks to our food system wrought by an increasingly temperamental climate, the foundational practices of organic agriculture are attracting increasing interest, and in turn, the work of Organic BC—advocacy, education, marketing, certification services—is in high demand.

Meanwhile, an enormous effort has been put to something long overdue: a review of our organizational structure. Our current structure was cemented thirty years ago, and our sector has evolved greatly since then. When Organic BC—then called COABC—formed, its 'members' were the non-profit organizations that offered organic certification in the province. There was no national organic standard at the time, and these certification bodies collectively represented nearly all of BC's organic farmers and other operators.

Today, the certification bodies that make up Organic BC's membership certify only around half of the organic operators in the province. This is holding BC's organic sector back. Our structural review is nearly complete, and in the coming months, Organic BC will announce its plan to modernize its structure and unite BC's organic sector, which will put it in an even stronger position to champion the ecological farming practices that produce healthy food and a happier planet.

It's been a privilege to serve in my role alongside so many dedicated people. I hope everyone had a boring farming season and I look forward to talking to many in our community about the changes that are coming soon to an Organic BC near you!

**Jordan Marr, President**

# A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

2023 was momentous, marked by significant achievements and renewed community engagement.

Our presence extended beyond conference rooms to impactful venues such as the Legislature in Victoria, communities across British Columbia, and the Parliament in Ottawa. This past year also marked a significant milestone for our organization as we navigated a return to in-person engagement with several successful regional events and our first conference in three years. These gatherings not only reconnected us across the province but also bridged sectors and scales, fostering invaluable relationships and collaborations. Each year builds upon the last, reinforcing our resilience and stability during ongoing challenges.

From climate disruptions to systemic pressures on our food systems, our resolve to collaborate and innovate remains steadfast. These challenges underscore the urgency for collective engagement to mitigate and adapt to evolving circumstances. Amidst these trials, there is much to celebrate. A pivotal decision emerged as we concluded our role as a conformity verification body after 17 years. This strategic shift allows us to concentrate on nurturing a cohesive organic sector in BC, enhancing our advocacy initiatives, sector development, and provincial program.

Reflecting on the past 15 months, I am filled with gratitude for the dedication and hard work that have propelled us forward during formidable challenges. Our community is rich in knowledge, experience, and resilience, driving continuous growth and development. While each annual report brings its own narrative, beneath it all lies a steadfast commitment to building a robust foundation for our sector's future.

I find myself humbled and thankful as I write this message once more. It is a testament to the dedication and contributions of everyone involved in our organization, sector, and community. Together, we forge ahead, guided by our shared values and commitment to the organic agriculture movement.

**Eva-Lena Lang, Executive Director**



# REPRESENTING BC ORGANIC OPERATORS

## BUILDING CONNECTIONS

In 2023-24, Organic BC continued to develop and strengthen collaborative relationships with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, partner organizations and academic institutions. These relationships are critical to the work we do in ensuring the needs and concerns of organic farmers, processors and distributors are heard, that knowledge within the organic sector is recognized and shared, and that innovation and growth is supported.

### **BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food**

Our relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food continued to grow, including our engagement on the Ministry's Advisory Group on Regenerative Agriculture and Agritech. Several advocates from the organic sector worked closely on this committee and co-led the extension and soil health working group. We also met with various MLAs as well as Minister Alexis and her team at BC Ag Day to discuss the organic sector's key needs and challenges.

### **BC Agriculture Council (BCAC)**

As a member of BCAC, our role is to ensure the perspective of organic producers and processors is included in BCAC's overall policy and advocacy work. Organic BC past president Niklaus Forstbauer served his last year as vice-president of the BCAC board of trustees, where he built many bridges and provided invaluable insights to the council from the organic sector. At BCAC's annual Ag Day and Gala, we met with cabinet ministers, MLAs and senior Ministry staff to bring forward concerns regarding the rising costs of production, crop insurance for organic producers, and water security for agriculture.

### **National Partner Organizations**

Organic BC continued to work closely with our national partner organizations, the Organic Federation of Canada, the Canada Organic Trade Association and Canadian Organic Growers, on key issues affecting the organic sector.



# REPRESENTING BC ORGANIC OPERATORS

## KEY THEMES OF 2023-24

**Agritech**  
Gene Editing    Fires & Fire Recovery  
Canadian Organic Standards  
Ministry of Agriculture and Food  
Drought    Farmer Mental Health  
Regenerative Agriculture  
Climate Change    Extension

## IMPORTANT SECTOR ISSUES

### 2025 REVIEW OF THE CANADIAN ORGANIC STANDARDS

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“These standards are being updated to clarify all the practices and substances that are applied at every stage of organic food production and processing. This will help maintain growth in the Canadian organic market.”

~Jim Robbins, President of the Organic Federation of Canada



Work on the 2025 revision of the Canadian Organic Standards (COS) is progressing well. Dozens of working group and task force meetings have been held and the review process is well underway. Over the period between the reviews, the Organic Federation of Canada

# REPRESENTING BC ORGANIC OPERATORS

has been working to put structures in place that ensure no undue industry interference or pressure, and that our organic principles provide the baseline for all standards revisions. As the standards become more and more technical, it's easy to lose sight of the principles. All of the review meetings will begin with this reminder, keeping both principles and practicalities in mind.

## **Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) Technical Committee on Organic Agriculture**

Organic BC became a voting member of the CGSB Technical Committee on Organic Agriculture. This group of volunteers, comprised of organic experts from across the country, is tasked with reviewing and updating the Canadian Organic Standards every 5 years. Nic Walser (registered agrologist, former verification officer and member of the Organic BC Accreditation Board) is representing Organic BC for the 2025 review.

## **GE SEEDS**

**"Mandatory traceability would ensure confidence for farmers and consumers in their food system, while not blocking access to gene-edited seeds. The organic sector would like to ensure there is a choice for farmers and consumers."**

*~Eva-Lena Lang, executive director of Organic BC*



The organic sector continues to be united in its requirement for mandatory notification of gene-edited seeds to ensure the integrity of our products for Canadian consumers and consumers around the world. For more information, please see our [media release](#), as well as the [Canadian Biotechnology Action Network](#) and [Canada Organic Trade Association](#) websites.

# REPRESENTING BC ORGANIC OPERATORS

## NATIONAL COLLABORATION & ORGANIC ACTION PLAN

**“The project brings together three key players to coordinate an approach that draws on each organization’s strengths. A stronger organic industry is not only good for Canada’s economy, but also for the environment.”**

*~The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food*



**“It is a pivotal time for Canada to recognize the organic sector as the government strives to meet its economic, environmental and social sustainability, and climate goals.”**

*~Tia Loftsgard, executive director of the Canada Organic Trade Association*

With funding from Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, the three national organic organizations, the Organic Federation of Canada, the Canada Organic Trade Association and Canadian Organic Growers, have worked in cooperation to develop an umbrella organization unifying the federal organic bodies. This not only gives the federal government a single body to communicate with and fund, but it also helps streamline and coordinate the organizations’ activities.

These organizations, in consultation with Organic BC and other industry partners, developed an Organic Action Plan (OAP) for Canada. Building on similar actions to grow the organic sector in the United States and the European Union, the OAP is a comprehensive plan that will recognize the important role that organic plays in the future of sustainable agriculture in Canada.

# INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF ORGANIC PRACTICES

## BC ORGANIC CONFERENCE

The 2023 BC Organic Conference was our biggest and best yet, with over 250 participants. Held in Penticton from Nov 7 - 9, the event featured a wide range of sessions on organic and regenerative agriculture, exciting tours, the annual Organic BC awards, a packed trade show, and amazing organic meals. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to its success, including all of you who supported, donated, engaged, connected, shared, laughed and played together.



**Read the full conference recap:**  
[bcorganicgrower.ca](https://bcorganicgrower.ca)

## BC ORGANIC GROWER

**Celebrating the BC Organic Grower's 25th anniversary and a new, full-colour format!**

In 2023, our issues were guided by the overarching theme of Building Bridges: the connection points within the organic community, the foundations of our strength, and what lies on the other side.

In the first issue of 2024, we leaned into the theme of connection and how it makes us more resilient—better able to weather the storms, both literal and figurative.

The print and digital magazine reaches over 600 growers and is distributed at events throughout the year. Online, articles from 2023-24 were viewed over 12,000 times.



**Subscribe, read past issues or advertise**  
[bcorganicgrower.ca](https://bcorganicgrower.ca)



# INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF ORGANIC PRACTICES



## ORGANIC INNOVATION SERIES

We developed a collection of virtual field days highlighting leaders in regenerative practices, rotational grazing and nitrogen management, giving an inside look at the tools and techniques being used by organic farms around the province to improve soil health and operational resiliency.



Watch on our YouTube channel  
[youtube.com/thisisorganicbc](https://youtube.com/thisisorganicbc)



## REGIONAL NETWORKING EVENTS

In February/March of 2023, we hosted a series of regional events throughout BC, travelling to Nelson, Kelowna, Kersley, Delta and the Comox Valley.

These events gave producers the opportunity to reconnect with other growers, discuss organic and regenerative agriculture, and stay up to date on the latest regionally specific practices, policies and issues.

PLUS 8 OTHER ONLINE  
& IN-PERSON EVENTS



# INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF ORGANIC PRACTICES



## ORGANIC BC PODCAST

The Organic BC podcast is an educational resource for farmers, gardeners, processors and other members of the organic food and farming community in British Columbia and beyond! In 2023-24, we released 20 new episodes, with 5,621 episode downloads and 2,816 unique listeners from around the globe.



**Tune in at:**

[organicbc.org/podcast](https://organicbc.org/podcast)



## AGRI-TECH WEEDERS STEERING COMMITTEE

In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Organic BC convened an Agri-Tech Weeders Steering Committee comprised of BC producers across varying regions and commodities, both conventional and organic, as well as members of research institutions, government agrologists and specialists.

The goal? To find out what agri-tech weeding equipment BC producers are interested in and to host a series of field demonstration days in the growing season of 2024, followed by academic trials to investigate the usefulness, cost effectiveness and viability of a range of different tools of interest.



## COVER CROPPING 101

We created a downloadable guide that explores the benefits of cover cropping, plus tips on selecting the perfect cover crop.



**Take a look at:**

[organicbc.org/covercropping](https://organicbc.org/covercropping)

# INCREASE THE DEMAND FOR ORGANIC FOOD, ITS AVAILABILITY, AND ITS PROFILE IN BC

In 2023-24, we continued to connect consumers to organic food and agriculture, through both digital messaging and in-person events. We also worked on plans to significantly increase our impact in this area moving forward!

## OUR DIGITAL REACH - @THISISORGANICBC

### WEBSITE



89K+ views  
30K+ users

### SOCIAL MEDIA



14K+ new followers  
745K+ accounts reached

### YOUTUBE



43K+ views  
4.6K+ hours watched



## ORGANIC DIRECTORY

With **over 15K views** in 2023-24, the organic directory connects consumers to organic, food, farms and businesses throughout BC.

[organicbc.org/findorganic](https://organicbc.org/findorganic)



## REACHING OUT

As part of our strategy to increase the demand for organic food, its availability, and its profile in BC, we attended several in-person events and created marketing collateral directly aimed at consumers.

### ➤ **Pacific Agricultural Show in Abbotsford**

The Organic BC booth is a popular spot at the Pacific Ag Show! This industry event provides an excellent opportunity for us to advocate on behalf of organic operators, educate consumers, and connect with other stakeholders from around the province.

### ➤ **Day at the Farm**

Organic BC spoke with hundreds of families about the value of organic at this annual event, hosted by the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust.

### ➤ **5 Ways to Save on Organic**

We created a [fact sheet](#) that outlines a few easy ways for consumers to bring more organic food into their lives.



# ACCREDITATION

The core work of the Accreditation Board is to perform the vital task of accrediting and/or recommending accreditation for member certification bodies. This procedure is critical to the BCCOP and COR programs and is accomplished with utmost regard to quality control.

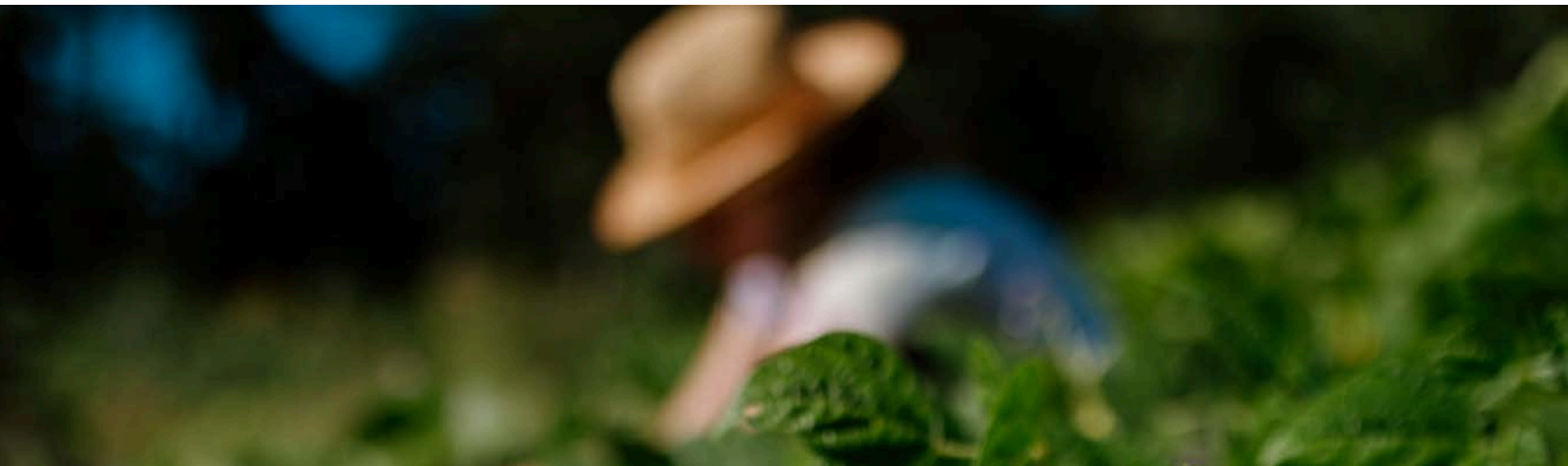
<b>5</b>	<b>509*</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3%</b>
certification bodies	operators certified or in transition	operators certified to BCCOP	operators certified to COR	operators certified to BCCOP & COR	operators in transition

\*Operators in multiple categories were only counted once

Organic is a complex industry, particularly in British Columbia as the sector (and our organization!) continues to grow and find its way.

We want to thank the Accreditation Board for their contagious passion and engagement and for tirelessly navigating the many administrative changes to the BCCOP and COR in recent years. The importance of their volunteer work is incredibly understated—it's a pillar of the sector. It's the kind of work you never see and can never measure, but is integral to the integrity of our accreditation programs.

***"The whole process of accreditation to certification is not understood by many, and the Accreditation Board has the difficult task of sometimes making unpopular decisions. At the end of the day, accreditation, with all its audits and oversight, exists to make everything better. It's not about saying where people are wrong—it's about surveying the ultimate stakeholder: the consumer." ~ Maureen Loft, 2023-24 Accreditation Board Director***



# ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

The organic certification system administered by Organic BC is extremely complex, with multiple structural layers and many stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. 2023-24 marked a period of critical analysis of the financial impact of Organic BC's accreditation and certification services, and generative thinking about the future of organic certification.

A thorough assessment was undertaken, and a final report and recommendations were presented to the Board of Directors in March. Recommendations included a new fee model that is fair, transparent, and includes all players in the sector, that accreditation and development services be financially independent of one another, and that Organic BC needs to expand its revenue streams for long-term financial sustainability.

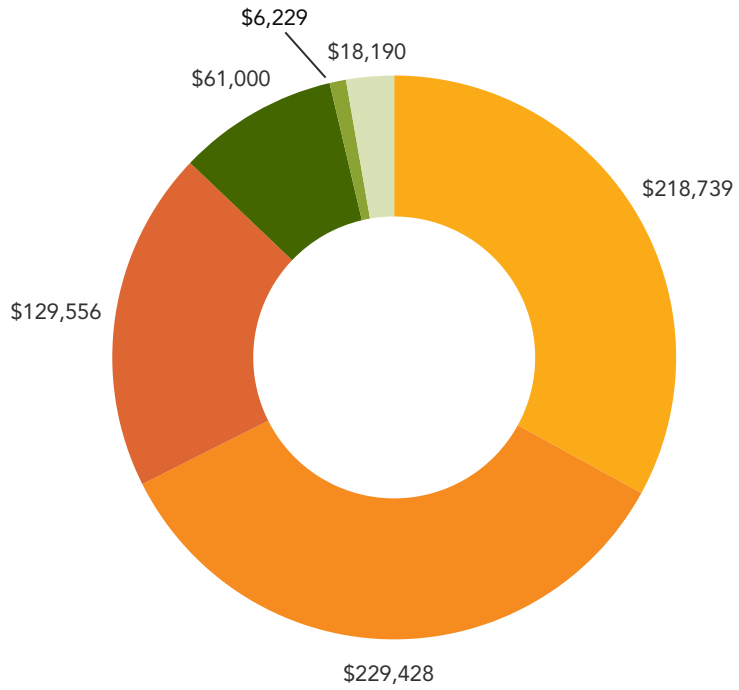
Following the report, a board/stakeholder committee met for a full day to discuss Organic BC's future direction and best pathways to achieve our vision of a unified organic sector. The Board of Directors approved all of the committee's recommendations including the decision to cease accreditation services to the Canadian Organic Regime by the end of 2024, and to pursue a voluntary, fee-based membership model open to all organic sector players.

Work on these and other changes continues, with implementation beginning in mid-2024.

# FINANCIALS

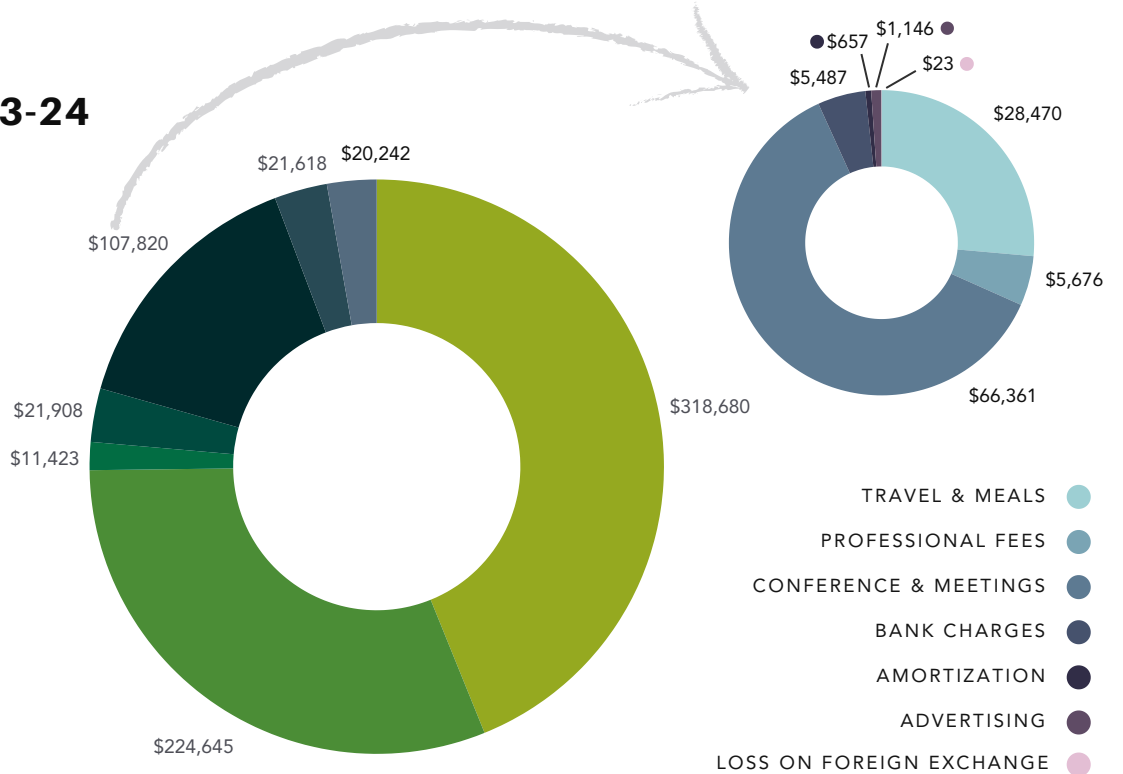
## REVENUE 2023-24

- FEES & SUBSCRIPTIONS
- GRANTS
- CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP
- SPONSORSHIP
- AUDIT FEES
- OTHER



## EXPENSES 2023-24

- CONTRACT FEES
- WAGES & BENEFITS
- COMMUNICATIONS
- OFFICE
- OTHER
- MEMBERSHIP & FEES
- RENT & UTILITIES



# OUR MEMBERS



**Pacific Agricultural  
Certification Society  
(PACS)**



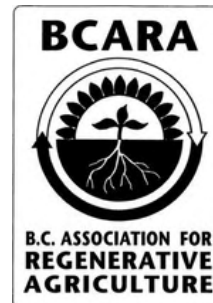
**North Okanagan  
Organic Association  
(NOOA)**



**Kootenay Organic  
Growers Society  
(KOGS)**



**Islands Organic  
Producers Association  
(IOPA)**



**BC Association for  
Regenerative Agriculture  
(BCARA)**



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**Moss Dance**  
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**Darcy Smith**  
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# THANK YOU!

## 2023-24 SPONSORS

renewal

RENEWAL PARTNERS



## SENDING GRATITUDE TO OUR COMMUNITY

A huge thank you to over 50 volunteers that helped us steer the Organic BC ship and kept it sailing!

And our most heartfelt gratitude to all our operators and organic champions everywhere, for your ongoing commitment to a sustainable food system and a healthier world. We are here because of you!



Cover photo credit: Maylies Lang x Square Root Farm