

# KOGS Board Annual Strategic Planning Report May 2000

## 1. Purpose

The KOGS Board of Directors is taking over leadership of KOGS at a time of rapid change in the certification movement. As well, it is clear that co-ordination and streamlining of the KOGS certification process needs tending. With a new Board and a hired staff position, new energy is available to get the KOGS house in order and to improve services to members. Given these circumstances, it was thought to be a good time to hold a strategic planning session to identify goals and focus areas for KOGS for the coming year.

Given the amount of time it takes to have deep, meaningful discussion and analysis of options, the Board took on the task to draft recommendations to the membership for your consideration and approval. The Board met in the inspiring environment of Brenda Elder's place on an ox bow of the Slocan River and, with the assistance of facilitator Susan Mulkey, spent the day talking about the future of KOGS. The outcomes of that session are presented here as a first step to begin discussion among KOGS members on what KOGS will look like in the future.

## 2. Meeting Goals

The meeting was focused around two complementary goals. KOGS has been active primarily as an organic agriculture certifier. The Board recognised that it will be important to identify future options for how we can provide certification to members most effectively. These options were discussed in the afternoon. Beyond certification though, the Board also saw a key role for KOGS in promoting organic agriculture to its members and to the public through outreach and education. A discussion of potential member support roles was discussed in the morning.

## 3. Future Vision

The starting point for discussions was to ask the question: What would you like KOGS to have achieved in 5 years time? The points noted below were produced through "brainstorming" and do not reflect group consensus or priority concerning the point in question. What do you think of these suggestions? What would be your own priorities for KOGS?

- Certification process is clear and functional for the membership and Certification Committee
- KOGS' primary role is education/outreach with the community at large
- Larger membership base
- KOGS markets on behalf of members
- KOGS is synonymous with organic farming in the Kootenays
- Access to a farmer's Hot Line (this is being set up by COABC)
- Using and networking the knowledge of the KOGS membership
- Strong partnership and collaborative relationship with the Spicer Centre
- Partnerships and networking with complementary groups and organisations in the region. Local Doukabors are a priority
- Service and support to the membership and potential growers is separate from the Verifying Officer (e.g. extension service model)
- Demonstration farm being created
- Research & development for organic growing with possible research trials at KOGS members gardens
- Consistent funding support
- Publication of a regular newsletter with a Kootenay focus
- Community agriculture is established widely
- More value-added agriculture

## 4. KOGS Members Survey 2000 – Top 4 Priorities

Last year, the Spicer Centre co-ordinated a survey of needs of organic growers in the Kootenays. The survey identified the following top priorities:

- Public education for market development
- KOGS logo as a marketing tool

- Bulk group purchases to reduce overhead costs
- Coordination of distribution and shipping within the Kootenays; central brokerage facility

The Board discussed the results of the survey to see whether some of the farmer's needs could be addressed by KOGS directly or in partnership with the Spicer Centre.

## 5. Priority activities for action in the next year

The following priorities were developed through a synthesis of the points raised in the vision, current KOGS activities and the member survey discussions. They are recommendations for KOGS goals to be worked on in the next year.

### • Organisational Development

- **Policy and by-laws:** Constitution and by-laws exist but are not well known. A mission statement and policy that includes Directors terms, roles and responsibilities needs to be developed. Additional Board policy also needs to be developed, including a decision making process. A list of required policy will be prioritised at a members' meeting in early July.
- **Partnerships:** The relationship with the Spicer Centre is a priority for KOGS. The mandates and activities of the two organisations have many linkages and opportunities for partnerships. KOGS will request that a Spicer Centre liaison participate as an advisor to the Board. Other partnerships to be explored include: Doukabors; Falls Brook Centre; Kootenay Co-Op; Evergreen; Ellisons; Endless Harvest; Community Economic Development Organisations.
- **Funding:** Board supports seeking external funding to support future program activities. Columbia Basin Trust is a key potential funder. Other opportunities include: Community Futures for small business development, Derek Murphy for Economic Development, Brandon Hughes at HRDC, COABC, Industrial Research Assistance Program, Industrial Adjustment Strategy
- **Board Working Relationships:** Policy must be developed for roles and responsibilities, member conduct and decision making for Board of Directors, Membership, the Certification Committee and any other committees. Effort needs to be made to continually recruit new Board members. Meetings around the region in Salmo, Creston and Kalso will be prioritised. Member contact information will be verified and updated (including emails whenever possible).
- **External relationships:** KOGS must stay connected with standards development and provincial certification (COABC). COABC is organising a two day strategic planning retreat in June which will be attended by Abra Brynne on behalf of KOGS. Board suggested KOGS join Canadian Organic Growers (COG) as a first step to building relations.

### • Member Support

- **Education:** The newsletter will be produced quarterly with the goal of facilitating networking at the community level. It will focus on sharing information and farmers talking to farmers.
- **Services:** Co-ordinate bulk buying for members. Investigate needs through the newsletter. Hold member potlucks with speakers on a monthly basis in the summer. Hold farm tours and allow for farmer to farmer dialogue.
- **Marketing:** The logo will be promoted to members. Costs of promotional materials (stickers, decals, etc.) will be researched with decisions to be made at the members' meeting in July. Fliers and logo will be made available at Kootenay Co-op. More discussion and perhaps funding are required to move ahead on support for distribution and brokerage.

### • Outreach and Community Education

- **Publicity and promotion of organic food:** Create a flier for consumers and backyard growers. Distribute through Co-op and Evergreen. Weekender articles.
- **Demonstration garden:** a long term goal. Why not have a research station in the Kootenays for organic growing? Funding possibilities must be researched.

- **Operating Principles:** Potential for KOGS to serve as an organization in which many otherwise diverse community perspectives can find common ground. Care must be made to model principles of openness, transparency and respectful relationships with individuals and groups.

## 6. Certification

As a starting point for discussions on KOGS Certification, the Board took a look at the existing structure and operating procedures. The following is a list of strengths and weaknesses of the present system.

### Strengths

- Local control - can select the VO; set own standards; CC has local knowledge of the farm
- Cost effective
- Local knowledge
- Builds local relationships and capacity
- Volunteers - expertise, willingness, efficiency, collaboration

### Weaknesses

- Time of the year conducting certification. Spring is too busy for farmers and volunteers.
- Six week period for certification papers creates a crunch. Longer notice is needed
- Lack of a standard operating procedure - needs updating
- Having KOGS standards is more work than lining up standards with COABC
- Lack of shared understanding of procedures and forms. Changes in lead volunteers on the CC has left us with gaps in the organisational memory
- Personality conflicts and power struggles within the organisation

## 7. Summary of Discussions

The following summary is a result of discussions of two overview documents prepared by Pat Mallet on the internal and external conditions for certification, as well as a number of options for certification models.

- Certification is a tool for producers to convey a message to consumer.
- The requirement for certification increases as the distance from farmer to the consumer increases.
- Farmers who sell at the local level require less formal certification.
- The majority of KOGS members (according to the recent survey) sell locally.
- The number of processors selling provincially and internationally is increasing.
- Small scale organic was the only agricultural sector that grew last year in all of Canada.
- The existing KOGS process lacks coordination and is time-consuming for volunteers. Hiring Deb Corbett is intended to assist the CC and reduce their time required.
- The field of organic certification in BC, Canada and internationally is under great change and development. It is important that KOGS be involved and aware of new developments.
- There are two key issues for members around certification: Cost and credibility. The cost must be affordable for small local producers, but a producer wanting to sell outside of the local area must have credible certification.
- KOGS certification process (farmers certifying farmers) is not considered credible under ISO guidelines.

## 8. Outcome/Recommendations:

- There is a role for KOGS as a certifier of locally sold food. KOGS will continue to provide certification services through a streamlined/coordinated process. This role should be reassessed in 3 years.
- There is an option for producers selling outside of the local area to access higher level certification (COABC, other international certifiers) if required. KOGS will assist members seeking higher level certification by providing information and contacts.
- Deb and Craig plan to go to NOOA for their next Certification Committee meeting in June. They will research NOOA's certification procedures, systems and forms as a step to refining the way KOGS carries out its certification.
- Quality control must be a priority in delivering certification. KOGS is likely to be audited by COABC next year. They audit each member certifier every 3 years.
- The number of available VO's must be increased. They must be rotated and a number of members will require an alternate soon.