

Affordable workshops for new farmers

Surrey seminars aim to encourage small-scale organic production

by RONDA PAYNE

SURREY – A series of four workshops focused on small-scale organic vegetable production will take place in Surrey from March to May. The sessions aim to give new farmers the knowledge they need to take produce from seed to sale at local markets.

Garry Fehr, event organizer and director of the Agriculture Centre of Excellence at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), notes the constraints on farming in the Lower Mainland make the workshops more important than ever.

“The average age of a farmer in BC is about 56 to 57 years old and there are also an increasing number of younger people who want to get into farming but don’t necessarily have the necessary background and training,” he says. “In addition, the cost of land constrains the capacity of this younger generation from purchasing existing farms to get into production.”

Laila Benkrima, a researcher at UFV and horticulture instructor with the John Volken Academy in Surrey, will lead the first three workshops. Fehr will teach the fourth. Participants can take as many as they like; each costs \$25.

The first workshop, on March 3, will focus on soil fertility, irrigation and water management in organic agriculture. Participants will also find out about the Canadian organic standards as well as exploring cover crops, compost and other organic



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amendments through hands-on exercises.

The workshops continue on March 24 with a look at organic agriculture, this time from a greenhouse perspective. Benkrima will share hands-on learning about germination, seedling development and transplanting of both annuals and perennials.

The third workshop, on April 21, will explore the importance of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in producing healthy and sustainable food as well as safe food handling. Additionally, pest and disease management in greenhouse crops will be reviewed with a view to identification and control methods.

The first three workshops run from 1 to 5 pm, while the fourth session led by Fehr on high-value crops and niche opportunities will run from 1 to 3 pm on May 5. New farmers may find this fourth session particularly interesting in revealing crop options within under-supplied markets.

“These workshops provide some essential training for potential new entrants that may be able to access small plots and for small scale producers that want to enhance their knowledge,” notes Fehr. “The farming community will benefit by building on the existing foundation of local agriculture through enhancing the knowledge of local producers; increasing the number of local producers that grow a greater range of crops for local markets and promoting local production.”

All sessions will be held in the state-of-the-art greenhouses known as BioPods at the John Volken Academy.

“The idea for these workshops came from the city of Surrey and the [UFV] Agriculture Centre of Excellence,” Fehr explains. “We had already partnered with the John Volken Academy to create the BioPods and recognized an opportunity to use this infrastructure with the expertise of Benkrima, who works and teaches at the Surrey Biopods, to encourage and enable potential new entrants in the agriculture sector.”

Vancity is a sponsor of the workshops.

Pre-registration is required. More information is available at [www.ufv.ca/ace/events], by emailing [ace@ufv.ca] or phone (604) 504-7441, ext. 4454. Tickets can be purchased at [ufv.bookware3000.ca/events-tickets].