

## Organic Vegetable Manual Adds to Slate of Quality Production Guides from Canadian Organic Growers

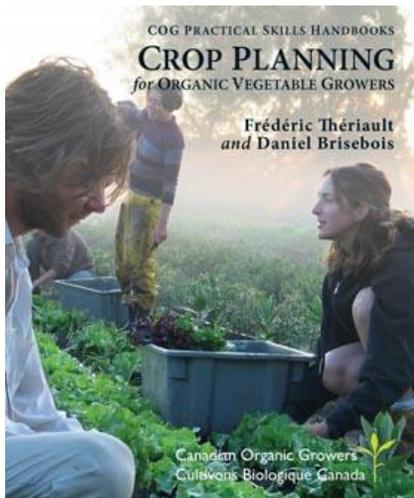
**Project title:** Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Producers: A Practical Skills Handbook

**Coordinator:** Kristine Swaren, Canadian Organic Growers, Ottawa, ON, Canada

**Stakeholders:** North American organic vegetable producers

**Links:** This results summary ([http://ofrf.org/funded/summaries/swaren\\_08f26\\_summary.pdf](http://ofrf.org/funded/summaries/swaren_08f26_summary.pdf)) as a downloadable pdf (2pp); Kristine Swaren's complete project report ([http://ofrf.org/funded/reports/swaren\\_08f26.pdf](http://ofrf.org/funded/reports/swaren_08f26.pdf)) ; For more information or to order the handbook visit the Canadian Organic Growers publication page.

### Results summary



Canadian Organic Growers (COG) has earned a reputation as a producer of practical, high quality production guides for North American organic producers. Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Producers, the latest addition to their Practical Skills Handbook series, was developed with support from OFRF and is now available from COG and other resources.

Part of COG's mandate as a member-based federal (Canadian) charity is to publish educational materials for organic and transitioning growers.

For market gardeners and farmers, growing 40 to 60 different vegetables at the same time is a challenge in itself. When direct marketing vegetables, producers also plant regular successions to ensure adequate harvests for each market outlet, whether it is farmgate, farmers market, restaurant and retail supply, or subscription (CSA).

Crop planning is complicated but this handbook presents planning in manageable and logical steps, with good reasoning behind why each step is important and what will be gained by going through the process. It provides readers with a lot of how-to guidance with templates, examples, a case study running throughout, and real-life success stories.

COG selected Frédéric Thériault and Daniel Brisebois to author the book. Fred and Dan are two of the five farmers who run Tourne-Sol Cooperative Farm near Montreal, Quebec. The farm has grown quickly in the five years since it was founded from 30 to 250 CSA customers plus farmers market sales. Crop planning has played a key role in the success of their operations.

The crop planning process described in this book was developed over a number of years on different farms. Fred and Dan drew on their studies, farm experience, existing resources, and interviews with vegetable growers across the country.



***Canadian Organic Growers***

*Handbook authors Fred Theriault and Dan Brisebois at market with their vegetable crops.*

The general outline was the same for all the successful farmers they spoke with: set objectives for the season, figure out roughly how much to grow, order the seeds, take some notes during the growing season, and use those notes to plan the following year.

Following their formulas gives a vegetable grower not only a complete seed order, but more importantly a week-by-week calendar of greenhouse and field operations, plus templates to record harvests and sales so that the method can be customized the following year.

The book profiles eleven vegetable growers, showcasing a range of operations from a small intensive acreage that works with walking tractors and hand tools, to large farms that rely on cultivating tractors and sizeable workforces. They are all examples of how good crop planning helps a farm thrive. Farm profiles are one of the favorite features of COG books.

The Crop Planning process is useful for vegetable growers regardless of their level of experience or size of their operation. Its methods apply not only to commercial growers but also to homesteaders. As well, the planning process will appeal to non-organic market growers though the organic focus of the book includes crop rotations that are the basis of soil building.

**The eleven steps presented in the book are:**

1. Set your financial goals
2. Develop a marketing plan
3. Make field planting schedules
4. Create crop maps
5. Choose vegetable varieties and finalize planting schedule
6. Generate greenhouse schedules
7. Fill out a seed order
8. Make a field operations calendar
9. Carry out the crop plan
10. Analyse crop profitability
11. Plan for next year

**Along the way, the method explores:**

- Figuring out initial sales projections in terms of financial needs and stocking a CSA and/or market stand;
- Approaching crop planning mathematically and systematically: calculating the quantities, planting dates and planting frequencies of each vegetable needed to meet sales projections;

dividing the types of vegetable according to their different growing and harvesting characteristics to facilitate planning (comprehensive vegetable reference charts are included);

- Estimating the yields and safety factors to ensure the targets are met and how these numbers change as the grower's skills improve and the crop plan matures;
- Considering the big picture in the crop plan: bed and field layout, crop rotation, soil-building, organic regulations and management practices, and how one year's crop plan fits into a multi-year perspective;
- Monitoring the crop plan and keeping records: keeping on top of the plan through the season and how to modify the plans on the fly to keep production on track;
- Reviewing the crop plan as the season ends in terms of profitability in space and time and how this leads into next year's plan.

For more information or to purchase the handbook, visit Canadian Organic Growers publications page: Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers (<http://www.cog.ca/news/14/15/NEW-Crop-Planning-for-Organic-Vegetable-Growers/>).

OFRF funding was awarded for this project in Fall 2008. A final report describing project results was submitted in April 2010.



*Fred Theriault and Dan Brisebois in the field at their worker cooperative Ferme TourneSol (Sunflower Farm) in Les Cedres, Quebec (near Montreal).*

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