

## Necessity Fosters Organic Farming

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Poverty and political alienation have long plagued Cuba and Uganda. But those problems also produced an unintended benefit by forcing the two countries to rely heavily on organic agriculture.

"They are two shining light countries," said Jean Arnold, organizer of the International Organic Agriculture Conference.

The one-day event is today, on the first day of the 22nd Annual Organic Agriculture Conferences at the University of Guleph.

Visitors from Africa, Asia, and the Americas and representatives of the Canadian government and non-government organizations that fund projects in their countries will discuss the role of Canadians in overseas organic agriculture.

Arnold, executive direction of the Fallsbrook Centre, a sustainable development organization in New Brunswick, said Cuba is moving quickly towards an entirely organic agriculture sector.

"When Russia pulled out, so did Cuba's ability to get chemical fertilizers and pesticides," she said.

Similarly, in Uganda, political instability under former dictator Idi Amin cut off access to chemicals.

The Fallsbrook Centre has forestry projects in Sri Lanka and Costa Rica where shade trees and perennial plantings are being used to restore soil depleted by plantation agriculture.

Small farmers are now growing certified organic coffee, species and tea in shaded ecosystems and mainstream supermarkets are increasingly stocking their shelves with organic foods from tropical countries.

The Montreal-based Rural Ecological Agriculture Program showcases its work each year at Guleph's organic conference.

This year, visitors from China will talk about sustainable ecological villages being developed in China under the programme.

Other groups participating include Friends of the Earth and the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy. Also on the agenda will be the issue of genetically modified foods.

"Many people don't want to walk down that path, even for food aid," said Arnold, adding that Third World farmers are better off managing their farms through an organic system.

Arnold said she was invited to bring the day of international workshops to Guleph because there was so much interest in last year's organic conference in international organic agriculture.

"We hope it will become an annual event," she said. About 70 people have registered for the international conference. They are also planning to participate in the main conference that starts on Friday and is expected to draw 1,500 participants.

A highlight Friday will be the seminar on organic dairy production, with participation from Ontario's three organic dairy pools, Organic Meadow, Sun Rich Valley and Harmony Dairy.

A public forum on the topic "Who Will Feed the World?" is scheduled for 7pm Friday at the Thornborough Building.

On Saturday, a full schedule of workshops includes an introduction by Toronto's Foodshare to opportunities for city-based organic food production and a workshop on creating the perfect eco-home, including pesticide-free landscaping.

More workshops on Sunday include an organic farming seminar for beginners presented by Bruce Country sheep farmer Gayl Creutzberg.

Throughout the conference, a large trade show will fill the University Centre with organic suppliers from across North America.