

How tiny frogs inspired someone to make a difference.

By Matt Orlesky

In today's world, more and more people are realizing the impact we have on our environment. Every day we hear about the dangers of global warming and depletion of natural resources, and the importance of environmental sustainability. One person with a passion to do something about it is Debra Morse, director and co-founder of the Organic Islands Festival.

When asked where the inspiration came from to create Canada's largest outdoor "green" event, Deb relates a story from her past. "We were living on a 40 acre hobby farm on the Saanich Peninsula... The owners started to clear the property and subdivide. The chain saws were buzzing every day, trees started coming down, the bush was cleared, piles over 15 feet high were being burned, and the ash started to fall." As a result, she says the Pacific Chorus tree frogs were losing their habitat. She says they even climbed the walls, attaching themselves to second storey windows. The neighbours and owners grew increasingly despondent.

"It was in the midst of this mess that I conceived the idea of a web portal for the organic sector." Deb explains. "In retrospect, I think what was going on in my own backyard was a snapshot on what was happening on a global scale, and I responded with the tools I had at hand to make a difference while meeting my family's needs." That idea became the driving force behind what Deb has created today. "This may sound grandiose but there really was a deep heartfelt passion driving me that I didn't completely understand at the time." Without any experience in the business of organics, Deb and her husband Stuart created a place on the web where anyone could access eco-friendly and organic products and services. Now, the festival has become what Deb describes as the "organic expression" of that resource.

organic vision



Participants in last year's "udderly" delightful Organic Islands Festival.

Now in its third season, the festival is seeing huge growth as more exhibitors sign up every year. Deb says "The green business community needs a vehicle to promote itself and gain a profile for the important works it's doing to create a sustainable future. We are building a big tent for farmers,

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organic wholesalers, retailers, service providers, horticulture professionals, environmental organizations and government bodies." This summer's festival will offer foods from some of the largest organic companies out there, such as Nature's Path, North America's leading producer of organic cereals, and Level Ground Trading. There will also be educational opportunities; festival-goers can learn how to grow a year-round organic garden or what it takes to lessen the impact of climate

change as a consumer.

Before the festival starts, however, organizers are conducting what they call the Green Business Survey. First, they examine the key issues affecting green businesses by sampling trends in industry sectors. Then, a second survey will ask how those current trends are benefiting green business and what challenges they present. Deb says the survey is important to the festival and the community. "It's an opportunity to take the temperature of the green business climate before heading into the festival. We want the sector to have a voice and express what the challenges are as environmental issues come to the forefront and make people more aware than ever before about the changes that need to happen."

She adds "We have been hearing about corporate companies who are not traditionally concerned with our environment suddenly making it a priority." The folks at Organic Islands hope to prepare the community for the challenges ahead by identifying trends early on. This way, she says "early adopters and new entrepreneurs alike

can respond to increased demand."

This year's festival again takes place at the Glendale Gardens and Woodland, located on a 100-acre conservation park next to Viaduct Lake, near the Interurban campus of Camosun College. Deb believes "it's the ideal setting for the festival because it connects people with our environment, and reminds them why it's important to seek out a more sustainable way of living. We want to continue to enjoy places like this."

While environmental awareness expands throughout Canada, the green industry here is expanding more each day. People like Deb Morse and the Organic Islands organizers are working hard to provide a fun and educational opportunity to keep us informed of what's happening in the organic world while providing a showcase for local, eco-friendly entrepreneurs. It's also your chance to sample some of the finest organic food products on the market right now. With more and more demand for these products and services, what you see on display at the Organic Islands Festival could be the shape of things to come. =

The Organic Islands Festival:
July 7th and 8th at Glendale Gardens and Woodland.
www.organicislands.ca

