



Peace River Councillor Karrilyn Vince, P.Ag. (left) being presented with her P.Ag. certificate by Keith Duhaime, P.Ag., President Elect at Dec. 8th Council meeting.

CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE ACTION BY COUNCIL

In fall of 2007 a complaint was laid against one of our members by another member, with the gist of the complaint that the member had breached the BCIA Code of Ethics, specifically section 1 (b) of the guidelines: *"To express a professional opinion only when it is founded on adequate knowledge and experience, and where Agrologists have an understanding of the situation and context against which the opinion is being offered."*

Mediation between the two members was conducted by the Chair of the Conduct and Discipline Committee, as allowed for under the BCIA bylaws, with no satisfactory conclusion being reached. The complaint then proceeded to the Conduct and Discipline Committee who found the member subject of the complaint to have indeed breached section 1(b) of the ethics guidelines. They reported their findings to Council along with suggestions as to remedial actions. Council reviewed the determination and set a course of remediation for the member subject of the complaint, who has undertaken the remedial action. Under our current bylaws, because the remedial action required by Council was undertaken, the name of the member subject of the complaint is not to be released. If the remedial action had not been taken and the file had progressed to the issuance of a citation by Council, the name and complaint would have become public information.

A report and comment by Bob Holtby, P.Ag., Chair of the Conduct and Discipline Committee follows.

In a recent case before the Conduct and Discipline Committee, the finding was reached that:

The member's failure, whether (by) understanding or description, to adequately set out the situation and context against which (the) opinion is being offered, (the) failure to

distinguish among facts, assumptions and opinions in (the) preparation of this report, and (the) failure to clearly indicate the constraints within which (the) opinion holds and the relevant qualifying circumstances, facts and assumptions, constitutes professional misconduct. (decision edited for clarity and confidentiality)

This decision (accepted by Council) now establishes the context in which an Agrologist may offer an opinion. In short, an Agrologist may not offer an opinion unless he or she has done the work or the work has been completed under his or her direct supervision.

For those who act as fee for service consultants, this finding affects the outline of our work and our billing practices accordingly. It also can affect government employees who may be asked by other government agencies for an opinion on land capabilities or use. Clearly, such an opinion may not be offered without a site visit, a familiarization of the soils on the site, a description of the assumptions behind the opinion, and an understanding of the forms of agricultural production, both actual and potential, on the site.

I am aware of the time pressures and limited resources that were, and apparently still are, placed on Agrologists to produce such opinions. Nevertheless, when having to decide between a quick response and a full response, an Agrologist has no choice but to decide the latter. I expect that this finding will have impact on work plans in the public sector just as it has in the private sector. Nevertheless, it is appropriate that managers be aware of the standards under which Agrologist employees must work to offer opinions.

*R.G. (Bob) Holtby, P.Ag., Chair
Conduct and Discipline Committee*

RATION OVER PASSION

One of the challenges that we Agrologists face today is dealing with the passions of the very public whose interest we are bound to protect. Rarely a day passes when the popular press does not indulge itself in propagating hysteria in the form of an errant obsession¹ with 'peak oil' or the ridiculous² hyping of local food, to mention but two examples. This is not to say that the world's second oldest profession is exclusively complicit. Often these simplistic revelations are sourced and/or proffered by a supposed think tank or visionary whose true 'food security' issue might have been rooted in their self interest to scare up some grub to butter

¹ *Staff, Steady as She Goes – Why the World is NOT About to run out of oil., The Economist, April 26, 2006.*

² *Martin Gooch, Local Food – The Untold Story, George Morris Centre, October 22, 2007.*

their bread with, than a genuine interest to enlighten the public. Be it hype or hysteria, a lesser-informed public does grab on to these issues as a perusal of many local newspapers or radio shows will quickly demonstrate.

The result is that often we as professionals are put in the position of having to correct clients or the public at large with respect to the issue of concern with the facts. In the process, it brings emphasis to our own duty as professionals to 'undertake stewardship of sound scientific principles' for the public interest, lest we create situations where our own work or opinions need to be corrected. In such instances, not only then do we bring question to our own practice, but to the profession in general.

Of course our professional training has provided us with tools to ensure that an opinion we proffer or support is based on sound science. Consistent with evidence-based practice, our first duty is to carry out a critical review of the scientific evidence before offering up an opinion.

Secondly, our basic analytical training provides us with means of discernment. When presented with the hysteria or hype of the day, have the risks been accounted for in the scenarios we have been presented? Is the scenario in question stochastically dominant to alternatives? When formulating policy recommendations, have the uncertainties been accounted for in the governing dynamics? Too often the soothsayers of our demise or redemption seem to overlook these fundamentals, if not outright ignore them. As professionals, we should be first in our fields of practice to challenge them to 'show the math', else 'shut the mouth'.

We must also be careful in our associations. Do organizations to which we belong, in their passion, espouse views at odds with our professional expertise, or that of our fellow professionals? If so, what is the message that we are sending the public?

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to let passion get ahead of reason. We must be on guard for this in our own work and in our associations. As a self-regulating profession entrusted with the public interest, we must also be prepared to challenge our fellow professionals when this happens as well. Fortunately we do have a structure, our Conduct and Discipline Committee, and procedures in our by-laws. These provide the possibility for members in error to 'make whole with the institute' through a full range of processes ranging from mediation and reconciliation to the levying of fines and suspensions, and even expulsion. It may be unpleasant at times in our dealings with differing constituencies, fellow professionals, and the public, but the integrity of the title Agrologist demands it, if we are to maintain our reputation and relevance to society in the future. Hence, as the title says, our motto must always be, "Ration over Passion."

Keith Duhaime, P.Ag., M.Agr.

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BRANCH REPORTS

Kootenay Boundary Branch

Nineteen members of the Kootenay Boundary Branch, of which eight were Articling Agrologists, attended three events on Saturday, November 17, 2007 in Creston:

1. Ethics Workshop

There was a good turn-out for the Ethics Workshop which was presented by Don Rugg, P.Ag., CAC, Executive Director & Registrar.



Kootenay Boundary Branch members consider an ethical issue – from left to right - front table: Duane Holder, Tim Singer, Don Low, and David Yole; rear table: Juliet Craig, Harry Quesnel, Kathy Bisset and Mike Malmberg.

2. Kootenay Boundary AGM

During the AGM, President Mike Doggart, P.Ag. presented a P.Ag. certificate to Lisa Heinbuch, P.Ag. Lisa had earned her P.Ag. status in February 2007, but this was the first opportunity to present it.



President Mike Doggart, P.Ag. presenting P.Ag. certificate to Lisa Heinbuch, P.Ag.