



September 2017

# OSCIA PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

## Message from the President - Mack Emiry



It seems to be particularly difficult to write a message this year without commenting on the weather. In much of Ontario, difficult planting conditions were followed by exceptionally wet and cool weather for haylage/hay making. Forage volumes have been high with considerable variation in quality. Despite weather challenges, I hear of record yields of fall wheat with good quality and we are also seeing above average yield in spring barley.

In July, the OSCIA Executive travelled to St. Clair Region for an outreach meeting. There is strong interaction between OSCIA and Conservation Authorities in this Region. This was evident in the work which is being done to reduce phosphorous loss and entry into the waterways. Cover crops and reduced, targeted, or no till methods are proven practices to achieve this objective.

Caring for our soil and understanding what is happening below the surface has become a major focus of our organization, as it is with good farmers (stewards of the land) everywhere. The Summit on Canadian Soil Health was held in mid-August and was organized by the Soil Conservation Council of Canada. The event was packed with excellent presentations on the measurement of soil health and sustainable management. Field visits with researchers, soil specialists, and farm operators focused on what can, and is, being done to mitigate and even eliminate soil degradation. While we are all conscious of water and wind erosion, have we considered tillage erosion? This provides another reason to use reduced tillage as much as possible.

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An interesting comment was made by the representative of a crop input company at a crop tour I attended in Temiskaming District in July. We were looking at an excellent stand of corn and the statement was made that with the rapid advance in genetics it would not be many years before corn varieties available would mature even sooner than required for the area. This is an area where growing corn was rarely attempted only a few years ago.

Until the next time,

*Mack Emiry*

Mack Emiry, OSCIA President

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER, ISSUED  
ALONGSIDE 11 REGIONAL NEWSLETTERS AND  
OMAFRA CROP TALK, TO UPDATE SOIL AND  
CROP MEMBERS

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OSCIA Provincial Newsletter • We are farmers actively seeking, testing, and adopting optimal farm production and stewardship practices



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## Farmers, Conservation Authority Spearheading Water Quality Improvements

Farmers in Essex County's Wigle Creek subwatershed are working closely with the local Conservation Authority to help improve water quality in the region.

The algae bloom in nearby Lake Erie has made phosphorous reduction a key priority, according to Katie Stammler, Water Quality Scientist with the Essex Region Conservation Authority. She credits local cash crop farmer Henry Denotter with helping to bring a Priority Subwatershed Project (PSP) to the Wigle Creek area.

Funded through the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI), the project offers eligible farm businesses up to 80 per cent cost share to a maximum of \$75,000 to establish specific agronomic and soil health Best Management Practices (BMPs) on the land they farm.

"We want to show what we are doing and what we can do to reduce phosphorous levels through BMPs and Henry was a big advocate for this program coming to our region," said Stammler.

To date, almost half of the 30 farmers in the watershed have launched on-farm projects in the subwatershed. Wigle Creek was chosen for the program because it is representative of the greater Lake Erie watershed area: cash crops grown on Brookston clay soil, flat topography, and high in-stream phosphorous concentrations.

Projects involving cover crops, in-field erosion control structures, conservation tillage, phosphorous management and crop nutrient plans have been particularly popular. Through a partnership with the local co-operative AGRIS, for example, nine farmers have completed five-year crop management plans for their land and most of the watershed has been grid soil sampled.

Funding has also gone to support new equipment purchases by farmers, including strip tillers and technologies to incorporate fertilizer into the ground or do variable rate nutrient application.

Denotter, who has about 450 acres in the subwatershed area, feels that ensuring fertilizer is placed in the ground is an excellent way of keeping phosphorous out of water courses.

He used PSP funding to help buy a new fertilizer and seeding air cart and then worked to modify it for better performance and integrate it with his existing equipment.

"The air seeder helps control the fertilizer placement because it's all going directly into the ground," he explained, adding that he also used the program for cover crop trials. "The funding has been a big help."

And he's pleased with the outcomes to date—strong plant root systems, good earthworm populations and marbled earth are signs that soil health is improving.

His farm often serves as host to twilight meetings and farmer information sessions, as well as tours led by Grain Farmers of Ontario, Farm & Food Care and others so people can see conservation tillage and 4R nutrient use strategies (application at the right source, right rate, right time and right place) in action.

"I've learned from other people over the years and I enjoy the networking and having people coming out to look at what we're doing and asking questions," Denotter said. "And we need grassroots involvement in these types of initiatives."

For Stammler and the Essex Region Conservation Authority, a significant benefit of the project has been being able to build positive relationships with local farmers. The organization has an agricultural technician on staff, but the water quality staff members aren't farmers, so being able to learn from local landowners who are has been invaluable.

"It's very beneficial for us to have more on the ground knowledge and get a better understanding of what we're asking them (the farmers) to do, their challenges, and why they may be hesitant to do something—it's mutual respect building," she said. "People who aren't farmers have to understand the risks of what it takes to do BMPs."

Funding is still available for projects in 2017, the final year of the program. Eligible BMPs include cover crops, alternative phosphorous application practices, crop and field nutrient management plans, drainage and water management, buffer strips and conservation tillage.

To participate in the program, eligible landowners have to be willing to share historical land use data for their fields in the area, including crop types and yields, fertility and tillage practices, and field characteristics like drainage, tile spacing or soil sample results.

"We'd love to see more people try cover crops or complete a crop management plan, for example," Stammler said. "It's also a good source of funding to help buy equipment."

GLASI is funded through *Growing Forward 2*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, and is delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

More information is available from <http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/oscia-programs/glasi/priority-subwatershed-project/>

Written by Lillian Schaer for OSCIA



## Sparkling Membership Engagement

During the skills development workshops earlier this year, members were encouraged to provide their input on resources that could be used to assist their local and regional associations. All suggestions were documented, and compiled into an "Association Wish List". Many great ideas were brought forward that could be used to spark membership engagement and provide added value. With Executive Committee approval and consideration of available budget, two ideas have been implemented now.

First, OSCIA is offering membership gate signs at a reduced rate of \$7.50 for a limited time. In the past, the provincial association has been offering the signs on a cost-recovery basis of \$15.00, but for a limited time will be absorbing the difference.

Our second item addresses one of the most attractive aspects of joining an association: the sense of belonging and the feeling that you are a part of something bigger. So, OSCIA developed a promotional window decal. The decal is affixed to your vehicle or shop window by static and not only showcases OSCIA's new branding, but provides a way for members to show their association pride. Decals can be purchased for a reduced rate of \$1.00 each.



For members interested in purchasing a farm gate sign or window decal, please contact your local secretary.

Written by Brittany Roka, Association Development Advisor

## Skills Development Workshops

With several new skills development resources in place and membership engagement growing, OSCIA is eagerly gearing up to launch the next round of workshops. After asking several local/regional secretaries and treasurers through scans, many common challenges were identified. To address those challenges, the workshop will focus on clearly identifying roles and responsibilities, reporting requirements, ways to recruit and retain new members, grant applications and more. Although training is not mandatory, many secretaries and treasurers have expressed their desire to participate.

During OSCIA's Summer Meeting in August, Regional Communication Coordinators (RCC) participated in a skills development workshop. The training was a good opportunity for RCCs to share best practices, brush up on their presentation skills, provide input on primary responsibilities, establish new skills and network. Many great ideas were brought forth during the table discussions and several RCCs have already expressed their excitement to start implementing those ideas.

OSCIA is continuously working to increase skills development resources and amplify membership engagement, so we as an organization can keep moving forward to reach this goal that was set out in our 2015 Strategic Plan.

This project was funded in part through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial initiative.

Written by Brittany Roka, Association Development Advisor

## Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association SOIL CHAMPION

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## The Summit on Canadian Soil Health

Sponsored by the Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC), the Summit on Canadian Soil Health emphasized the urgency of improving soil health. According to keynote speaker, Dr. Don Reicosky, Scientist Emeritus at the USDA, good soil health includes:

- a) soil particles that bind to each other (aggregates) with adequate pore space between the aggregates for retention and exchange of air and water, and
- b) sufficient living organisms ideally making up 5% of the organic matter.

Dr. Reicosky emphasized that “soil fauna and microbial action is the equivalent of grazing two African elephants per acre.” (Source: Jerry Hatfield, the director of USDA’s National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment in Ames, Iowa.) Tillage destroys soil micro-organisms and releases carbon dioxide. According to Dr. Reicosky’s research, after a 24-hour period, tillage with a moldboard plow releases close to 160 cumulative grams CO<sub>2</sub>/square meter versus no-till planting which releases only 7.2 gm CO<sub>2</sub>/square meter.

Don Lobb, coordinator of the conference, emphasized the importance of urgent action, with a summary of key points below:

Soil restoration is contingent on the increase and protection of aggregates, organic matter and biota;

Landscape restoration and stabilization is a necessary counter-measure to tillage erosion and pre-empts the highly promoted precision crop management;

Perennial forage production is critical to maintaining and improving food productivity on fragile and degraded land. Ruminant use of those forages results in large volumes of nutrient rich, biologically active water being returned to pasture and rangeland. This is critical to reversing the degradation curve;

Industrial and fuel use of crop materials and grains exploits organic matter and nutrients that are needed for soil regeneration. We need to be careful with this!

Water availability can be enhanced by strategic use of trees, soil cover, and strategic wetland protection. We can have a precision water management and cycling system through systematic combinations of sub-surface drainage, irrigation, surface water management and containment reservoirs. Water use efficiency may be measured by calories produced per volume of water used. This would be important for food production priorities.”

(Lobb, Don, Challenge Presentation: Who is Responsible? August 23, 2017).

With urgency to address soil degradation and a growing population, Mr. Lobb emphasized that we are all responsible for soil care: farm organizations, farmland operators, landowners,

crop advisors, agricultural support businesses, conservation professionals, the food processing and retail community, the science community, government, and society.

Full conference proceedings can be obtained from the SCCC website: <http://www.soilcc.ca/>

*Written by Harold Rudy, Executive Officer*



## OSCIA 2017 Summer Meeting

The OSCIA Summer Meeting is an annual event hosted by the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President. This year, that was Peter McLaren representing the Ottawa-Rideau Regional Soil and Crop Improvement Association in Lanark County. This is a great way for the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice to show off their farm as well as their local community. A tremendous amount of work goes into the event by the host’s family, the local associations, and a few key Guelph office staff! The Summer Meeting is an opportunity for the Board and some staff to meet face to face and draws in many past presidents, spouses and dignitaries. It’s a time to tend to association business, and to reminisce and catch up with friends. This year, the event started in Lanark, about a 1.5-hour drive north of Kingston, at the McLaren Farm. The beef and cash crop farm has been in the McLaren family since 1839 and is operated by Peter and Suzanne.

After a reception at the farm, the group went on a tour of Tatlock Quarry followed by dinner and entertainment at the Civitan Hall. While the Board and staff met for the formal business meeting on Monday, the other guests enjoyed the sights and sounds of the Region. The tour led to the RCMP horse stables, John Nanne test plots, the Barry Dean Museum, Carleton Place Museum, and Wheelers Pancake House, Sugar Camp, and Museums. Tuesday, traditionally, is the day the entire group tours together. This allows the Board, staff and other guests to enjoy a few additional sites, and enjoy one another’s company. This tour began with a visit to the processing plant of the Tatlock Quarry, then to the Rideau Canal Museum, and ending at Tackaberry’s Museum.

All the tours were informative, interesting and provided a wonderful opportunity to mingle with members and staff. Next year’s summer meeting will be held in the Georgian Central Region, hosted by Les and Mary Nichols.

Visit our website for more information on our association. <http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/association/>

*Written by Guelph Office staff*

