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Breaking Ground

(in Northeastern Ontario)

SPRING 09

A Publication of the North Eastern Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association (NEOSCIA)

A New Cash Crop for Farmers?

There is no question that 2008 was a watershed year for everyone. From the standpoint of skyrocketing fuel prices to the crash of the stockmarket, from political upheaval (on both sides of the border) to significant unemployment



among the masses, could there be any good to come of it all? Apparently "YES", if you are a farmer. The by-products that we have always considered to be "waste" will soon have a monetary value, at least here in Ontario. Here are some ideas collected at the "Emerging Opportunities with Wood Pellets Forum" held in North Bay on March '05.

It all stems from the development of the "Green Energy Act" initiated by the Ontario government. Currently before the legislature, the Act will establish conservation and renewable energy as a top priority for the government when procuring new supplies of energy for the Province. It will also enable Communities, First Nations, and Farmers (among others) to become energy producers. The government will legislate fair prices over the long term for renewable energy and GUARANTEE that it can be sold via the provincial energy network.

Case in point. Ontario Power Generation (OPG) has been ordered to close all of their coal fired plants by 2014 at the latest. They have the option to switch from coal to BIOMASS as a fuel source. At

their Atikokan plant, OPG has experimented with the burning of wood "Pellets" as an alternative fuel. Worked like a charm! Result? OPG is now seeking suppliers of wood pellets, as well as any other type of Biomass that can be pelletized and burnt. Atikokan will be the first biofuel energy producer, slated for operation in 2012. By 2014, OPG will require 20% of the current world supply of pellets.

So what does that do for the farmer? First, if you own a bushlot, the leftover woody waste from a cutting operation can be collected and sent to a pelletizer (many of which will be built in the next few years). Your excess hay bales can be pelletized. A field of straw can be harvested and sold as profit. A weedy field can be fertilized and managed for maximum CARBON production, rather than for feed quality. Provided that it is not a food crop, OPG will accept any biomass as a fuel pellet. Even the chaff and weed seeds.

The key is pelletizing and combustion in a

Continued on page 2

NOTE: **Sponsors/Advertisers needed for coming year. \$500 for 4 issues!**

This newsletter is published 4 times per year. Articles can be submitted in either English or French and should be submitted to the Communication Coordinator (see below). Please supply translation, if available.

Material in this newsletter is based upon factual information believed to be accurate. Action taken as a result of this information is solely the responsibility of the user. We reserve the right to edit articles.

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Northeastern Ontario Soil and Crop Caravan 2009

FARM NUTRIENT SOLUTIONS!

Watch for the invitation from your local association.

Small on-farm sessions to highlight ideas and provide insightful solutions

Meeting locations in every district across the north east.

Program:

1. On farm "Nutrient Management Walk" with Q & A session to highlight ideas for managing nutrients in an actual farm situation to benefit the environment and for profit. All and any questions are welcome! A discussion on summer and winter feeding and pasture management for beef cattle may also be included. Very much a 'how to' session geared to the local community. The walk may start at the farm yard and end in the fields. Something for everyone. Speaker: Keith Reid, Soil Fertility Specialist with OMAFRA.
2. If the next generation cost share program for environmental farm plan identified improvements is announced, the following will be included: "Money for Management... Nutrient Management that is." Find out how much and for what... 2009 EFP cost share explained. Speaker: EFP representative for the district.

Where

Tentative Date and Time

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Muskoka | June 8, 1 p.m. |
| Parry Sound/ East Nipissing | June 8, 7 p.m. |
| West Nipissing/East Sudbury | June 9, 1 p.m. |
| Sudbury | June 9, 7 p.m. |
| Manitoulin | June 10, 10 a.m. |
| Algoma | June 10, 7 p.m. |
| Cochrane | June 11, 7 p.m. |
| Temiskaming | June 12, 10:30 a.m. |

A New Cash Crop for Farmers?

Continued from page 1

modern burner, no matter if it is a home pellet stove or an OPG facility. The biomass is ground fine, and reformed as a pellet that looks similar to some chicken or rabbit feeds. As a pellet, both softwood and hardwood contain a similar energy content of about 8000BTU per pound. Agricultural biomass such as straw has a 25% lower energy content, but energy is source dependent.

A note of caution, however. Some Agricultural biomass sources (such as straw) are known to have a higher ash content than wood, and also have negative mineral content (such as silica) associated with them. Farm bioproducts can also be highly corrosive on the burners, compared to wood. There is much that is not known locally, but remember that this technology has been used for over 2 decades in Europe, especially Scandinavia. The info is out there!

To this end, NEOSCIA has approached "Fed Nor" to seek financing to hire a university graduate "Intern" for a one year position, starting this spring. The individual will determine the potential for farm biomass production for ENERGY in every farm community in the 8 Districts that make up the NEOSCIA region. Do you know a suitable candidate for this job? The individual must be under 30, graduating within the past 3 years from an appropriate university course. The position will be located in New Liskeard. Have the individual contact NEOSCIA President, Janet Parsons (705) 753-0730, immediately.

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Please note that the target publication date of this bulletin is the first Friday of each month. Submissions for the bulletin and requests to subscribe/unsubscribe may be forwarded to: shanna.james@ontario.ca.

Staff Update: I am pleased to announce that Pierrette Desrochers will be returning to her duties as Agricultural Representative effective March 16, 2009. We look forward to having Pierrette back on our OMAFRA team.

Upcoming Local Events:

1. Growing Your Farm Profits – Planning for Business Success March 16 and 17

Algoma District Services Administration Board –
Meeting Room, 1 Collver Road, Thessalon

This workshop will give you the tools needed to assess your current farm management practices and understand how proactive planning can influence effective decision making. Topics include marketing, production, financial management, human resources, social responsibility, succession planning, business structure and business strategy.

For information and to register, contact Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at 1-800-265-9751 or at www.ontariosoilcrop.org

2. Sheep / Goat Workshop March 19, 7:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Caldwell Township Building
Meeting Room, Verner

Presentations include Neo Natal Lamb and Kid Care - Dr. Amy Gah, Springer Animal Hospital and Forage Quality and Feeding Lambs and Kids - Barry Potter, Livestock Specialist – North Region, OMAFRA

For information and to pre-register, contact the NORO at 1-800-461-6132.

3. Economies in Transition: Leveraging Cultural Assets for Prosperity March 26, (8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.)

The Rosseau, a JW Marriott Resort
& Spa, 1050 Paignton House Road,
Minnett (District of Muskoka)

Cost: Adults - \$65; Students - \$25 (includes lunch)

The Ontario Rural Council (TORC) in partnership with the Municipal Cultural Planning Partnership is holding a workshop focusing on the importance of municipal cultural planning in driving economic growth and community development in rural and small town Ontario. Laurence Mawhinney, Mayor of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia will be speaking on cultural identity, heritage, sustainability and what makes his incredibly vibrant town tick.

Regional success stories and tools to help communities get started and succeed will be provided.

For information and to register, contact TORC at www.torc.on.ca or call 519-826-4128

4. Nipissing Soil & Crop Information Day and Seed Fair

April 1, Registration: 10:00 a.m.

Meeting: 10:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Verner Arena

For information contact Normand Delorme at 705-594-2324

5. Nipissing Soil & Crop Hay Day April 2, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Caldwell Township Hall Meeting Room, Verner
Presentation – “Making Quality Hay” with
Marc Côté, Agland (Manitoba)

For information contact Normand Delorme at 705-594-2324

6. Northeastern Ontario Farm Show

April 3, 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

April 4, 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Earlton Recreation Arena

Workshops on April 4th include:

Ira Mandell

- Steers on Pasture vs. Conventional Diets;

Mike Cowbrough

- Solutions for Weeds in the North;

John Rowsell

- Straw, How Much is There?

Becky Hughes

- Fresh Ontario Strawberries, 6-Months a Year;

Mitch Deschatelets and Dave Lewington

- Horticultural Crops for the Local Market

For further information contact Graham Gambles at 705-672-3105 or by email at gamblesgraham@yahoo.ca

7. Northern Powerpac All Breeds Bull Sale April 11, 2:00 p.m.

Temiskaming Livestock Exchange, New Liskeard

For information contact Barry Potter at 705-563-2752

8. Advantage – Good Agricultural Practices Workshop

April 18, 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Spring Bay Hall, 9298 Hwy 542, Spring Bay

Food safety is everyone's responsibility. That's why Ontario has introduced, Advantage – Good

Agricultural Practices, a workshop and manual to assist you in introducing and enhancing food safety practices on the farm. Advantage offers a whole farm approach covering all aspects of crop and livestock production. The practices can be applied to any farm, regardless of size, farming methods or products produced. For multi-commodity farms, the Advantage manual allows farmers to use one resource and keep one set of records.

This workshop will provide you with information and best management practices on irrigation water, post-harvest water, manures and composts, hygiene and an introduction to traceability. Participants will receive a complimentary copy of the Advantage – Good Agricultural Practices manual.

Pre-registration through NORO (1-800-461-6132) is required by April 8, 2009

9. Sudbury and District Beekeepers' Association Technical Workshop June 20, 2009

For information contact Dick Cowan at 705-522-6002

Upcoming Provincial Events:

1. Ottawa Valley Farm Show March 17 and 19, 2009

-Lansdowne Park, Ottawa

For information, visit: <http://www.ottawafarmshow.com>

2. Canadian Organic Growers Course – “Transition to Certified Organic Farming” March 20 and 21, 2009

– NEW LOCATION – Kemptville College

A hands-on course for experienced farmers interested in transitioning their farms to certified organic production.

Cost (includes proceedings and lunch):

\$200 non-members;

\$160 Canadian Organic Growers and Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) members

For information and/or to register, contact Karen Maitland, EFAO at 1-877-822-8606 or email: info@efao.ca or visit: www.efao.ca

3. Can-Am All Breed Equine Show March 20 to 22

Western Fair, London

For information visit, <http://canamequine.ca/>

4. Farm Safety Association's Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting March 30 and 31

Hilton Fallsview, Niagara Falls

For information, visit <http://www.farmsafety.ca;>

5. Food Meets Function – The Science and Business of Functional Foods Conference June 17 and 18

Best Western Lamplighter Inn and Conference Center, London

For information, visit www.foodmeetsfunction.ca

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Algoma Soil & Crop Improvement Association 2008 ANNUAL MEETING

by Sharon Lane, Regional Correspondent to "Breaking Ground"

Algoma Soil and Crop Improvement Association (ASCIA) held its annual meeting January 21 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Bruce Station Hall with about 70 members and guests attending. Harold Stewart, chair, opened the meeting reminiscing about the changes to the Soil & Crop Improvement Associations over the 70 years since its inception.

Murray Cochrane, incoming president for OSCIA, reported that all partner grants were completed, that the provincial director realignment will lead to better communications, that the booklet, *Crop Advances*, has a summary of all on-farm trials done by OMAFRA, and that the new self-assessment workshops, "Growing Your Farm Profits – Planning for Business Success" will be available in each area soon.

Dave Trivers, Agriculture rep., mentioned that Weed Control Trials on smooth bedstraw and other weeds (tansy) will be done and that field plots are needed for Forage Trials using camelina (false flax) and penny-cress (for biodiesel fuel). He presented the Algoma Corn Silage Plots data.

The plots at Scattered Acres had more fertilizer and yielded more tonnage.

Jonathon Stewart announced that Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) workshops would be held in the spring. "Growing Your Farm Profits" (GYFP) sees farming as a business; therefore, "planning is the key to success". A free two-day workshop is planned for March 16 & 17 in Little Rapids at the Algoma District Social Service build. This self-assessment workshop will clarify goals and identify strengths and needs.

Les Hillstrom (Vet Committee) mentioned that farmers might have difficulty in acquiring the services of a large animal vet in the near future. He urged members to approach the government to continue to subsidize OMAFRA for this service.

Tracey Cooke, MNR Stewardship Coordinator, explained the Stewardship Program. Her role is to facilitate the council members in their goals. For example, she might find out what grants would be available to them for their project.

Mark Van Veen, Salford Farm

Machinery, discussed tilling the soil & how it affects crop yield. His company has developed cultivators & RTP (Residue Tillage Specialist) that have had good results for corn yields.

Colin Trivers presented Dean Allen with the Award of Merit for 2008. Dean, a long-time member of ASCIA, had a milk quota from 1947 till 1979 and then beef cattle until 1990. He was one of the first area farmers to increase his milk yield by growing corn for his herd.

Joel Bagg, Forage Specialist from OMAFRA, discussed the cost and use of fertilizer and hay production. Fertility of the soil is important; otherwise, the farmer is mining the soil. Phosphorus potash and potassium should be replaced. He feels that Algoma should have access to the horse hay market, which wants a mixture of dry, green alfalfa and timothy in square bales with no dust.

Officers for the upcoming year were elected as needed, and the meeting was adjourned.

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Breaking Ground (in Northeastern Ontario)

Crop Input Costs Expected To Impact 2009 Grain Markets

By Stephen Kell, Parrish & Heimbecker

The key feature in the grain market for 2009 is the impact of higher crop input prices on farmer's planting intentions. Although input costs are always an important part of the grower's decisions on which crops to plant record crop nutrients costs for the spring of 2009 are amplifying the impact of inputs on this decision.

On a continental scale, we expect to see record soybean plantings in 2009 with most of the increase in soybean acres coming at the expense of corn plantings. This swing aggregated over the whole North American continent could be as large as 5 million to 7 million acres. With a corn acre consuming as much as 500 lbs of crop nutrient products and soybeans often going in without any fertilizer at all, the swing across the middle part of the continent is very easy to understand, but what does this mean to grain growers in Temiskaming?

Certainly farmers in the north are not going to be protected from the higher input costs. Corn likely never was an option, but a substantial decline in corn acres would translate to increased demand for feed grains world wide. Considering that the average corn yield is close to 4 tonnes per acre, it takes substantially more acres of cereal feed grains to replace the production losses from a decrease in corn acres. (If the economy were to replace 1 million acres of corn with 1 million acres of barley, we would still come up 2 million tonnes short of feed grain).

There is also a general consensus that 2009 crop yields will be lower than 2008. This is partially due to the exceptional growing conditions in 2008, but will also be the result of farmers limiting their use of crop nutrient products in 2009. While most growers have maintained their soil nutrient bank in good enough condition that they can withstand a decrease in fertilizer usage over the short term, expect 2009 yields to fall below the trendlines.

We may not see a rapid turn about in grain values as a result of lowered production in 2009, but it will tighten world stocks and perhaps shift the trend of grain pricing back to the high side. Due to the lack of sufficient money in the world economy to initiate a sustained rally, don't look for the turn around to come quickly it may take 6 to 8 months to develop.

With an expected increase in soybean production in the coming year, the oilseed complex is expected to be sluggish over the coming crop year. While this doesn't directly correlate to canola, the vegetable oil complex and the protein meal complex will be bogged down by the sheer size of the soybean crop. If canola is a part of your cropping program, forward contracting a portion of your production is a good way to avoid marketing in the harvest time glut that appears to lie ahead. Growers of soybeans need to make a very considered effort to take part in this strategy. (Think of this tactic as hiding in the cellar while the tornado blows through).



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“Make it Happen – success in reaching retail”

by Sharon Lane, Regional Correspondent to “Breaking Ground”



Will Samis reported on how the Penokean Hills Farms Beef Producers got organized and how it works.

The panel for this part of the conference consisted of Raymond Savage, the manager of Co-operative Regionale de Nipissing Sudbury; Dan Poulin, owner of Dan Poulin Potatoes Inc.; Troy Isaac, Last Mountain Berry Farms; and Will Samis, Penokean Hills Farms Beef Producers.

Raymond Savage gave his presentation on “Make it Happen” from the retailers perspective. His retail store sells local products: maple syrup, seeds, grains, beef, and preserves. Before he accepts a local supplier, he must consider the risks, which include liabilities, shelf life, type of supply (seasonal or long term), who will deliver product and how, special requirements to stock product (i.e. refrigeration), process involved in preparing and bringing product to market, other points of sale, restrictions on franchise, provincial/federal inspections and labelling requirements. The next consideration is what are the costs associated with selling this product. What does the producer expect to make on his product? Labour usually cost 10% to 15% of the value of the product, and grocery stores have only 20% profit. The third factor that he considers is what are the rewards for the retailer – money, exclusivity and traffic to the store and for the supplier – someone else sells the product. It should be a win/win situation for both the seller and the supplier.

Dan Poulin gave his view from that of a producer. His problem has been with stores that have become incorporated. They no longer will buy locally. His challenge is to educate the store managers/ owner that

people want local produce. Often his customers become vocal and ask for his potatoes. He suggested that the potato bags can be used for message such as “Thank you for buying locally” or “You are helping to save the environment”.

Troy Isaac has had five years experience in marketing and selling homemade jams and preserves in Saskatchewan. Demonstrations and exposure in large companies like Costco will help get the product

recognized. He mentioned that customers have to see a product five times before they will buy it. He found that if the producer generates a demand for a product the store would stock it. He has been trying to start Saskatoon berries commercially in Algoma since growing conditions are better than in the west.

Will Samis reported on how the Penokean Hills Farms Beef Producers got organized and how it works. A brand must have three recognizable attributes, and they feel that they have five. A mixture of beef cuts is boxed and sold. Each box is given a number so the meat is traceable and only one animal per box. The cattle are finished on a ration of peas and barley that is grown locally. None of the cattle receive antibiotics or growth hormones. In discussing that it is necessary to build alliances, Will mentioned that they invited the butchers from the local retailers to the Cattlemen’s Association meetings. His closing words were to learn all you can about your product, aim for the highest quality and don’t relax your standards.

Dorene Collins from Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) addressed ‘The What, The Who and The Why – Understanding Food and Value-Added Regulations. The Ministry will provide workshops for producers so that they can understand them. Building relationships and using the resources will help people navigate through them. The rules and regulations are established for the public good.

Rose Diebolt explained how she, as owner

of Garden’s Gate Restaurant on Manitoulin Island, is “Filling the Order – from the farm to the plate”. She buys as much local organic produce as she can and grows all her own herbs. She tries to serve one vegetable that is different (beet greens) to get people tasting different vegetables and to educate people. She sends out a paper newsletter with a recipe, as she is not adept with technology.

Nancy Guppy of Chapman’s Landing Cooking School tries to use as much locally grown produces as she can. She advocates the “100-mile “ or for Canadians, the “160 km” diet. She uses a website to advertise her classes as well as putting information on that educated people on the value of healthy eating

The final panel of the conference was on “Rebuilding the Middle – Innovative Distribution Models”. Diana Bockus from a Thunder Bay area Food Buyers’ Group explains how the group is organized. Instead of shopping at a store they submit their grocery list and the food comes to them. She has 50 steps to set up a food buyers group. To her the advantages are they support the local economy, they know when it is best to buy certain items, and they don’t spend time and money going shopping.

Mark Trealout with Kawartha Ecological Growers is supporting small-scale sustainable agriculture in the Kawartha Lakes area, increasing access to “good, clean, fair food, and paying the farmers 75% of the money he charges for their produce. He gathers produce from other farmers and delivers it to Community Shared Agriculture (CSA), to restaurants and goes to Farmers’ markets. He feels that the best way to go is CSA.

The final panellist was Dave Lewington of Dalew Farms. He entitled his presentation “Piracy in the Food System: Taking Back the Middle Ground”. Since he thinks that the word ‘organic’ doesn’t mean anything anymore, he prefers to say that he is an “authentic food producer”. He “pastures” his hens, pigs, cows and lambs and uses no pesticides or chemicals in his market garden. He sells at a Farmers’ Market, at his farm gate and has 60 members in Community Shared Agriculture.

Renewable Energy Workshop

by Sharon Lane, Regional Correspondent to "Breaking Ground"

The Community Renewable Energy Workshop & Trade Show was held at the Echo Bay Community Hall on Thursday, November 20 with near full capacity. The workshop was sponsored by Upper Lakes Environmental Research Network (ULERN), Ontario Sustainable Energy Association (OSEA), Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, Innovation Initiatives Ontario North (IION), Tulloch Consulting Group, Great Lakes Power Limited, and the Township of MacDonald, Meredith and Aberdeen Additional.

The objectives of the workshop, according to David DeYoe of ULERN, were to explore options, inform and enable people to make informed decisions.

The challenges are that the options include all energy: renewable, finite and recyclable. The shift to renewable energy is being driven by global sustainability. The population increase has put a strain on the planet because there is more demand for energy and at the same time water has been depleted and pollution has increased. The overuse of the natural resources of the planet has caused a change in climate. Climate change is one global threat. The last 20,000 years saw a temperature change of 5 to 6 degrees; the last 150 years with the first Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America and the second one in China and Japan has increased the carbon dioxide and this has increased the globe's temperature. This warmer climate in Ontario will cause a different forest in our area. Plants and animals cannot adapt in the 35-55 years that the change has come, so they are stressed. This problem can be seen in Northern British Columbia where the Mountain Pine beetle has invaded the lodge pole pine. A drought stressed these trees and now they are now under attack by the beetle. An area twice the size of New Brunswick has been destroyed. The Mountain Pine Beetle is moving eastward and will attack the Jack pine in the Boreal forest. Population of the globe has increased due to advancements in technology. Both China and India are industrializing and putting demands on energy.

Mr. DeYoe suggested that these global threats could also be opportunities.

Mr. DeYoe stated that Canada is the third

highest consumer of energy in the world. Canadians have to change their energy consumption by becoming more efficient, greener or more compact, that is by moving into cities.

Peter Gagnon from ULERN spoke on "Energy Conservation First". He said that sustainable energy means conserving energy, improving efficiency and using renewable sources of energy. He gave statistics to show that Ontarians are the "energy hogs of the world". Ontario households use 10 000 kw hours per year while households in the Netherlands use 3000 kw hours per year. The Government of Ontario will pay 50 % or up to \$150,000 for a Home Energy Audit to show where energy is lost and what can be done to conserve it.

In speaking on "Renewable Energy Options – Biomass", David DeYoe mentioned that there is biomass from the forest, farm and city. Forest biomass could include slash, sawdust, and any non-merchantable wood. Farm biomass could include switchgrass, willow, grain, straw or hay. There is about 1.2 million acres of unused land in Ontario to grow crops for biomass. Animals can also produce alternative energy. Manure can produce gas that in turn can be used to produce heat. Cities have garbage that can be used to generate energy.

Roberto Garcia from Ontario Sustainable Energy Association (OSEA) spoke on geothermal, solar, wind, and small hydro energy sources. Geothermal includes steam or hot water in earthquake areas and earth energy using water or heat from the ground. He stated that solar energy could replace coal generation for peak energy consumption periods. He mentioned that there are more jobs created with developing wind energy than any other forms of energy.

To conclude the workshop, Mr. DeYoe stated that threats can be opportunities and the first step in conserving energy should be at home and in our businesses.

GHG Calculator Project

The Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC), the face and voice of soil conservation in Canada, will be evaluating a new computer-based tool designed to help agricultural producers identify opportunities to calculate and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on their operations.

Holos, a greenhouse gas calculator designed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), analyzes a range of on-farm conservation management scenarios and determines potential reductions in GHG emissions. It is being evaluated by SCCC's Taking Charge Teams across Canada, who will test the program by plugging in real data provided by farmers. They will then report their findings to AAFC, who will modify the program into a final version for field use.

Holos covers various conservation practices such as reduced or zero tillage, rotations with perennial forages, tree planting, riparian buffers and nitrogen management, says SCCC executive director Glen Shaw. "At a time when the agricultural industry is under pressure to reduce its carbon-based emissions, this tool offers producers the opportunity to identify and set specific reduction goals," he says.

In Ontario, the Taking Charge Team led by OSCIA Director Alan Kruszel, has been doing some extension activities to raise awareness of the Holos Project. In partnership with other team members from Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario and OMAFRA, they will be setting up a series of Holos testing workshops throughout the month of March to give producers a chance to try out the software, and try a few mitigation practices to see what impact those practices may have on their operation's emissions. If you are interested in participating in one of these free workshops, please contact your local RCC for dates and locations.

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RESOURCES • E-Bulletin

continued from page 3

Program Updates:

1. Cattle and Pork Producers Given More Time to Repay Cash Advances

Cattle and hog producers facing hard financial times have until September 30, 2010 to repay cash advances under the Advance Payment Program (APP). The extension of the deadline for livestock advances was announced by Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. In addition, the first \$100,000 of each producer's advance will continue to be interest free.

The extension of the repayment deadline applies to regular and emergency loans taken by cattle and hog producers during the 2008 – 2009 production period. The Stay of Default covers more than \$450 million in advances to the livestock sector.

Producers can apply for APP emergency advances until March 31, 2009. Regular APP advances will continue to be available. Beginning in April, producers who meet eligibility criteria will be able to apply for 2009 – 2010 regular advances.

For more information, contact Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada at 1-866-345-7972.

2. Ontario Market Investment Fund

The Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF) supports innovative market research, communication and/or marketing projects that encourage Ontarians to buy locally produced foods.

Projects are cost shared, with the provincial government investing up to 50 percent of the eligible costs to a maximum of \$100,000 per approved project.

Eligible applicants include but are not limited to:

- Strategic alliances between individuals, businesses, producers, processors, community organizations including not-for-profits and / or municipalities.
- Agriculture and food industry associations in Ontario including food retail and the food service industry.
- Groups comprised of two or more partner organizations or businesses including at least one food producer or processor.

Individuals or individual businesses are not eligible to apply as sole applicants.

A copy of the program guidelines and the application can be accessed at: <http://www.omifra.gov.on.ca/english/food/domestic/omif/omif.html> or by calling the NORO (1-800-461-6132).

3. Northern Ontario Growth Plan

The Ministries of Northern Development and Mines, and Energy and Infrastructure are leading the process to develop a Growth Plan for Northern Ontario. The plan will provide a long-term economic blueprint to revitalize the North's economy. Thirteen technical forums, including one for agriculture, and a Think North Summit were held between October

2008 and February 2009. Copies of the discussion paper, presentations and online surveys can be accessed at www.placestogrow.ca. Take the time to review the materials and provide your ideas and input on the development of the growth plan. A draft plan is expected to be released later this spring.

Resources

New and revised OMAFRA publications and factsheets are available through the Northern Ontario Regional Office at 1-800-461-6132

Publications:

2009 Supplement – Fruit Production Recommendations – This free supplement contains new product registration and changes from January 2008 to January 2009. It will accompany new book orders for Publication 360 and can also be ordered separately

Factsheets:

08-051 Preparing Business Plans – replaces 99-011
08-065 Out-of-Season Breeding Alternatives for Sheep – replaces 02-063

E-Resources and newsletters:

OMAFRA Podcasts – Podcasting is a method of accessing audio files, usually in a MP3 format, without requiring you to re-visit a site to see if something new is available. By subscribing to an OMAFRA podcast, new audio episodes that are added to our site will be automatically sent to you as soon as they become available. You can listen to them whenever you want from your computer or portable MP3 player. For further details or to subscribe to an OMAFRA podcast, visit <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/subscribe/podcast.htm>

Ontario Virtual Beef is an electronic newsletter produced quarterly by OMAFRA's Beef Team. It provides the latest in research findings and results, recommended production practices and solutions to industry issues. To read a copy or subscribe, go to www.ontario.ca/livestock and click on OMAFRA Virtual Beef

OMAFRA Environmental Management Newsletter, <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/nm/newsletter/emn.htm>

OMAFRA Agricultural Business Update: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/news/index.html#agbus>

OMAFRA on Organic newsletter: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/news-organic.html>

OMAFRA Horse News and Views www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/news.html

OMAFRA Website: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/>

Ontario Hay listings: <http://ontariohaylistings.ca/>

Agricorp: http://www.agricorp.com/en-ca/news/dates.asp#dateID_445

Canadian Organic Growers

by Laura Telford, executive director

On June 30, new rules will be unveiled that will provide consumers with the assurance they need that foods carrying the word "organic" are produced and processed according to strict organic standards. Currently, Canada's organic farmers and processors follow voluntary standards and there is no government oversight to penalize companies making fraudulent organic claims.

In the lead up to June 30, the organic sector has been upgrading the organic standards which are referenced within the new Organic Products Regulations. Changes were required by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Standards Council of Canada. A number of other changes were also made to harmonize Canadian standards with those of our major trading partners.

Under the current voluntary system, many Certification Bodies and provinces have maintained their own organic standards. After June 30, all players be on the same page as they adopt the national organic standards.

Because of the large number of recent changes to the organic regime and to the standards, Canadian Organic Growers (COG) has developed a new training program, in association with its industry partners - the Organic Trade Association and the International Organic Inspectors' Association, to get Certification Bodies operating under the new regime, organic inspectors, processors and farmers up to speed on the new system and rules.

As a result of the new organic rules and a more recognizable logo on organic foods nationwide, we expect increased demand for organic food and an increase in the number of conventional farmers considering organic production as an option. For this reason, COG and its Ontario partner, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario have also developed new training materials for farmers considering or in transition to organic farming.

Visit www.cog.ca/shop to register.

<http://canadagazette.gc.ca/par-tl/2008/20090214/html/regle1-e.html>

Filling the Need for Alternative Energy

by: *Graham Gambles, NEOSCIA Regional Communication Coordinator*

The capacity crowd at the North Bay "Wood Pellet Forum" heard from many speakers. Here are the views of many of them...

Dr. Warren Mabee of Queen's University noted that the modern wood pellet house stove is about 80 times more efficient than the open traditional fireplace. Similarly, modern industrial burners that combine flue gas recovery with heat and power production are about 80% efficient. Although Sweden derives about 35% of its heat from wood, Canada only gets 4% of its energy from wood. Most of this is recycled wood waste products, with only 20% of the wood burnt coming directly from the forest.

Currently, we have no idea how much "surplus" forest biomass is available for energy production. Same goes for agriculture. However, due to the 2008 economic collapse, we know that ethanol obtained from wood pulp is of significantly less value than traditional wood products made from pulp. It is also worth noting that ethanol made from straw usually produces about 10% less energy from an equivalent weight, but that the economic return will vary depending on the cost of processing.

Due to the fluctuating economic values of the raw material and the finished product, government should supply subsidies in the initial years of industry development. Similarly, rather than specifically using wood or agricultural biomass for energy production only, Canada needs to develop an overall "Bio-Refinery" system for the optimum use of these raw materials.

Jay Aspin of "Trade North Ontario" mentioned that a trade mission to Scandinavia in 2005 showed the huge opportunity that was available in producing energy from forest and agricultural sources. However, no one from Ontario was interested then. Today it is different. All of Canada wants to work with the Europeans on the coming opportunities. He also noted that Nipissing University will be the depository of all available and developed Biomass infor-

mation within the North-East region.

While Canada has ignored the potential of biomass due to our dependency on relatively cheap and plentiful fossil fuels, Europe has developed the technology necessary to make use of available biomass. On the positive side, the Europeans have worked the kinks out of the equipment and we can now invest in high quality industrial equipment that will make our switch to biomass energy very efficient.

Ontario does have people available to design or upgrade the equipment necessary to meet our local needs. Glen Ruby of Timbercreek Farms develops high tech equipment that will turn sawdust into a pellet. The firm has designed equipment designed to "change tooling" very quickly in order to allow raw products (with unique characteristics) from various sources to be run through a single pelletizing plant. His equipment could run sawdust one day and switchgrass the next. One pelletizer can produce 3 T of pellets /hour, so cost per tonne of production is low. He believes that due to the huge demand and short timeframe presented by the OPG changeover, there will be a huge investment in equipment over the next few years. Quality Hardwoods, a local company that produces Kiln dried hardwood, has already made the switch to pellets. Peter Van Amelsfoort said that the price for oil became so high in the past 2 years that it was essential to make the change in order to survive. He had considered developing a co-generation plant, but the cost and lengthy development time frame made it prohibitive. He installed 2 "Dekkar" pellet-boiler systems (with scrubbers) that each give 35,000,000 BTU per hour with a hot water target of 195 F. He does keep the old oil burners for a back-up system, but the wood pellet burners saves over 50% of his fuel cost when heating oil is priced at \$.80 per litre.

Claude Brisson of "Ecoflamme" spoke on the creation of "Renewable Energy Clusters". This is a concept that is widely used in Europe in order to keep the mon-

ey circulating as much as possible within a specific region. In northern Ontario, a project in any given District would have 5 basic components. These are :

1. develop biomass recovery techniques
2. develop biomass pellet factories
3. develop distribution lines
4. encourage installation of home and industrial pellet burners (or generators)
5. train and hire technical personnel to maintain equipment

The raw material could come from either the forest or farm, and recognizes that due to the high cost of transportation, projects should be developed that meet the needs of a specific local population.

Roland Kilpatrick of the National Research Council noted that out of necessity, Sweden became a leader in Biomass energy as they had no fossil fuel reserves. They now have "district" heating systems in every community with a population over 10,000. Their climate is similar to Canada, so their Biofuel heating system is probably replicable here.

We have an advantage. Canada is already the worlds largest exporter of wood pellets, although almost all of these come from B.C. The current world consumption is 10 million tonnes per year.

A wood fibre pellet has a high energy density of 40#/cu.ft. and burns at 8000 BTU per pound. Conifer trees have more energy than deciduous, and straw is in third place. However, canola straw producers 25% more energy than conifers! Industrial hemp is known to be very productive in terms of mass, but the energy output is not available.

Modern pellet stoves are up to 95% efficient and furnaces for the home have modern, low-labour fuel delivery systems. It is worth noting that Montreal is considering a ban on all wood burning stoves and fireplaces with the exception of the modern pellet burner.

A Perspective on the Canadian Fertilizer Industry

By Neil Tarlton, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

With the Canadian fertilizer corporation Agrium this week making a "hostile" bid for the US company, CFI holdings, urea prices reaching a high of over \$800.00 (US) per tonne last year and the Chinese government slapping a 110% export duty on all nitrogen fertilizers to protect its domestic market, it is really difficult for Canadian farmers to calculate their cropping strategy.

Not only are commodity prices, post harvest, highly unpredictable at the time of one's winter planning for spring seeding. The input costs, fertilizer being a major one, are also extremely volatile.

One is asked the question, "why the Canadian government cannot protect Canadian farmers from fertilizer price hikes by also putting a tariff on exports? The same as the Chinese government did.

Free trade is a major policy of the Canadian government. The Canadian fertilizer industry exports 12.4 M tonnes of fertilizer which is 95% of its potash and 50 % of its nitrogen production to more than 70 countries. We rank # 1 and # 2 in the World in the exports of those two commodities.

of Saskatchewan, Canada's major potash producer, fell 75% from 246/share in June 2008 to \$61.00/share in December.

The future.

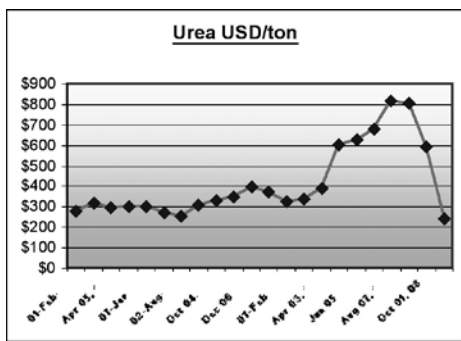
Locking in some of one's harvest to a future price, that at least covers the cost of production, is a hedging technique commonly used to reduce some of the risk of profitable crop production. Early shopping around for competitive input costs, especially a major one like fertilizer is also a good practice.



Blended fertilizer. Potash is pink, nitrogen white and phosphate grey

Fertilizer companies are likely to become even larger and operate on a global basis. Takeover bids will sometimes be successful, resulting in larger companies taking over others, especially when their management perceives the economic climate as being "right" Fertilizer producers are making technical advances too. "Smart" fertilizers will have release mechanisms which will allow nutrients, especially nitrogen, to be available at the opportune time of plant growth. At present up to 70% of nitrogen is lost to runoff, volatilization or descending into the groundwater. Farmers need to continue lobbying to insure that some of the monetary benefits of the increased efficiency of farming stay as increased net income for the farm family.

(Credits:- after Dr. Carlos Monreal Agriculture Canada, Agrium Co, Yara Co., The Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan)



Above, Urea prices 2007 - 2008

Investors including Canadian pension funds appreciate the freedom for Canadian corporations to operate in a free market, both from the perspective of having markets for their products, unencumbered by tariffs and the share price of the company to be allowed trade openly. In spite of this the shares of the Potash Corporation

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a partnership of:

Temiskaming Soil & Crop Improvement Association

N.E. Ontario Wheat Growers

Temiskaming Grain Growers

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Biomass Energy Essentials: Q & A

1. Why are biomass fuels such as wood pellets, wood shavings and agricultural residues considered to be :CO₂ neutral”?

The biomass residues from forestry operations are branches, needles and leaves, collectively known as “slash”. The residues from lumber mills are bark, sawdust, wood chis and shavings. Agricultural crop production residues are usually some form of straw. All of these residues decompose naturally over time. The products of this decomposition are fundamentally the same as the products of burning this biomass residue material: heat, grasses, and a relatively small quantity of solid material. The primary difference is that natural decomposition is a slow process, whereas combustion is relatively quick.

2. How much biomass is required to replace oil and natural gas, to produce heat?

It is important to note that the energy content of biomass is often measured on a “dry basis”. This is sometimes also called “oven dry” or “bone dry”. These terms mean that there is no water or humidity in the product. Measuring energy content in this way permits easy comparison of various potential biomass fuel sources.

In actual fact, different biomass fuels may contain from 5% to 60% moisture. It is very important to take the actual moisture content into consideration when designing a biomass heating system, and when purchasing biomass fuel.

| Fuel | Quantity | Energy Content |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Natural gas | 1 cubic metre | 36.6 MJ |
| Fuel oil | 1 litre | 36.2 MJ |
| Wood pellets (10% moisture content) | 1 kg | 16.56 MJ |
| Wood chips (20% moisture content) | 1 kg | 14 MJ |
| Seasoned wood (20% moisture content) | 1 kg | 14 MJ |
| “Green” wood (50% moisture content) | 1 kg | 8 MJ |

Net energy content (dry basis) of different type of biomass

| Fuel | MJ/Kg (d.b.) |
|---------|--|
| Spruce | 18.8 |
| Pine | 19.2 |
| Beech | 18.4 |
| Oak | 18.2 |
| Poplar | 18.5 |
| Straw | 17.1 – 17.5 |
| Cereals | 17.1 (wheat, rye) – 26.5 (Canola/rapeseed) |

Net energy equivalents

1000 litres of fuel oil extra light approximately equals

- 5 – 6 stacked m³ hardwood (logs)
- 7 – 8 stacked m³ softwood (logs)
- 9 m³ (hardwood) – 15 m³ (softwood) wood chips
- 2000 kg or – 3 m³ wood pellets

Source for energy data Austrian Bioenergy Centre GmbH, “Energy and Biomass”, April 28, 2008

3. Aren’t biomass systems smelly and smoky?

Not when the biomass combustion system is properly designed and operated. Burners and boilers are available for the complete range of biomass fuels, and it is important to match the combustion system to the available fuel. For example, one should not put green wood into a system designed only for seasoned wood, that one would put diesel fuel into the fuel tank of a car designed to run on gasoline. Modern biomass combustion systems typically produce far less SO₂ and NO_x emissions than do fossil fuel combustion systems, and produce no visible emissions

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Biomass for Fuel: *Where are the Opportunities?*

by Graham Gambles, NEOSCIA Regional Communication Coordinator)

At the 2009 Annual General Meeting of the OSCIA in Niagara Falls, two speakers addressed the issues around the opportunities that have developed for a "Biomass" industry. They were Chris Young of "Ontario Power Generation" (OPG) and Dean Tiessen of "Pyramid Farms Ltd.", based in Leamington.

Young pointed out that OPG currently has 7 coal fired generators operating in the Province, including two in north-western Ontario. Due to a change in government policy, all seven must find alternative sources of fuel by 2014, if they are to continue operation. A test program run at the Atikokan plant proved that wood biomass was an excellent replacement for coal at that facility. It is very compatible with the furnaces that were designed to burn the low quality form of coal known as "Lignite". This generator is now scheduled to run completely on Biomass, starting in 2012.

There are 6 reasons why the Province should switch from coal to Biomass. This product is renewable and available on demand. There is no "net" greenhouse gas emissions and it therefore contributes to a lower carbon future for the Province. It has a synergy with both the Forestry and Agriculture industries. Most importantly, it will make use of the existing coal fired generators that would otherwise be closed by 2014.

OPG does have a few policies that will apply to this new operation. First, they will not burn food crops - grain corn, for example. Second, wood fuel and agricultural products must be obtained by a sustainable harvest method. The Biomass must be obtained with a minimum negative impact on consumers.

In 2008, OPG had offered an initial "Request For Expression of Interest" for the purchase of a small biomass supply. Many more offerings will come in the future. OPG is expected to require 20% of the "current" world supply of fuel Biomass by 2014. Therefore, the opportunities are great for both the Agriculture and Forestry industries. However, OPG does not want to deal directly with individual suppliers. They would prefer to work with an aggregation of smaller producers, generally known in the farm community as "Co-ops".

The basic requirement is that the fuel must be delivered to the OPG facilities as "Pellets" or "Pucks". It can be either wood or agricultural products. It can not be material that can be used in the food chain, and it can

not be officially designated as waste (such as manure or household garbage).

Time is of the essence. The supply contracts must be in place by 2011 to meet the OPG changeover timetable. Contracts will assure a reasonable return for all involved. The contract term could be 10 to 20 years. For more info, see the web at www.opg.com.

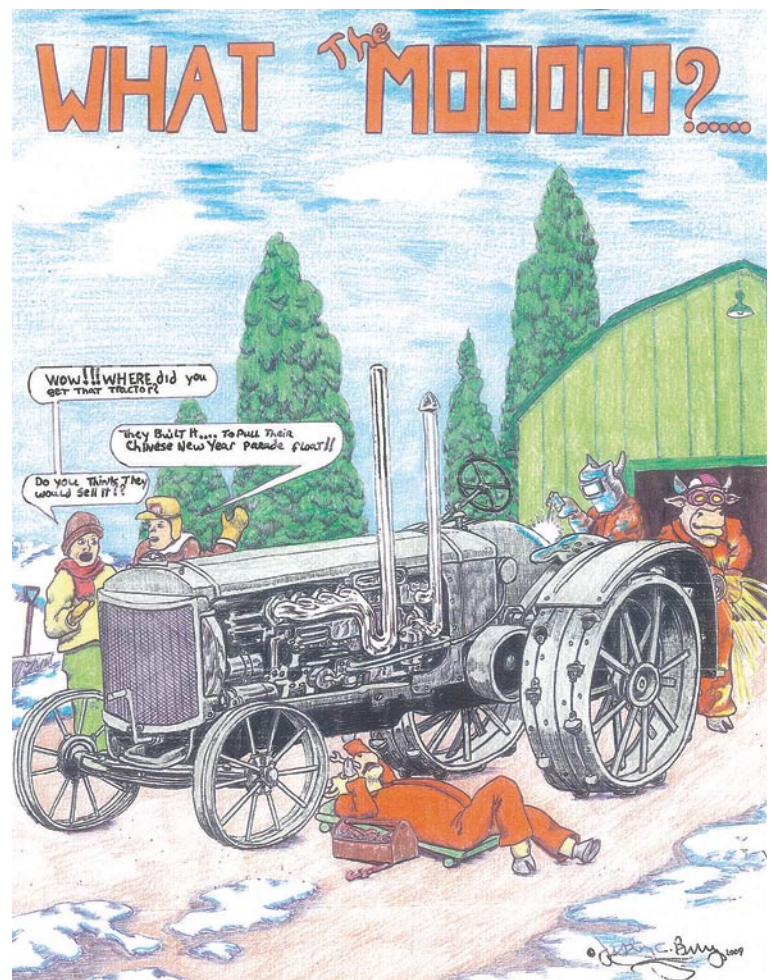
Dean Tiessen, a greenhouse tomato producer, has been using wood biomass to heat his facility since 2006. He has found that all biomass energy sources have both advantages and disadvantages. Most agricultural biomass species are "unimproved" and undergo basic harvesting at any moisture level. Perennial grasses are high yielders, even with low inputs. They can be harvested in the fall in a relatively dry state and easily held over the winter.

There is a great difference in yield between specific varieties of plants, ranging from 4 to 40 dry tonne per hectare. Remember that a high carbon content is essential for a high BTU value for any specie. Conversely, a high nutrient content (as in many agricultural products) is considered to be a negative as it leads to more ash and even corrosion of the burners.

There are a number of "improved" plant species that may be major players as a biomass fuel crop sometime in the future. One example is "Amouri", that is said to be highly productive. A species

called "Miscanthus", (currently being tested at Ridgeway) has the same energy content as wood, but grows faster under specific conditions. It must be planted by "plug" with specific equipment already developed in Europe. Note that Monsanto has bought all the seed rights to this species and is now upgrading the seed quality and fuel output of this plant.

As for any crop, economic production depends on climate, soils, and the species grown. The crops must be sustainable and have a positive energy balance. Can it be done? YES! The industry exists and the scalability has been proven in Europe over more than two decades. The Ontario hurdles include government policy, infrastructure development, marketing, and a guaranteed return on investment.



This month's artwork comes from Justin Burry of Thornloe. View more of his work at <http://justin-burry.tripod.com>