



MEDIA RELEASE

Greenbelt Farm Stewardship Program in the Holland Marsh

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Prepared by Nancy Tilt for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

The Holland Marsh is a community of some 125 farms on 7,000 acres of low-lying land bordering the Holland River, containing some of the richest farmland in Ontario. Growing enough carrots alone to provide every Canadian with four pounds each year, the Holland Marsh plays a large role in Canada's food export market and serves a substantial local market in the neighbouring Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Doug Van Luyk and his family grow carrots and onions on 300 acres, plus additional rented land. They have always farmed with an eye towards protecting the environment. Management practices that are a routine part of their operation include crop rotation, cover crops to reduce wind erosion, a system of underground pipes from the Holland Marsh Canal for irrigation purposes, an Integrated Pest Management monitoring program to optimize their pesticide use, and yearly soil samples to ensure efficient use of fertilizer.

"Farmers have always been stewards of their land," explains van Luyk, a third-generation vegetable grower in the Holland Marsh. "We have to be. Our land is where we live, earn our livelihood and play. It is in our best interest to look after our land for future generations. And the care we take of our land extends beyond our properties to benefit the broader community."

Since 2005 the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has championed activities that preserve and enhance agricultural, rural and ecological integrity. Through the Greenbelt Farm Stewardship Program (GFSP), farmers have been able to obtain up to 75% cost share funding for eligible beneficial management practices (BMP). Over 800 projects have received cost share contributions from the \$2.4 million total commitment made by the Foundation since the program's inception.

Van Luyk is a Director of the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, established in August 2008 to provide a unified voice concerning issues of importance to the Holland Marsh agricultural community. "We are grateful to the Greenbelt Foundation for providing a \$400,000 grant to help establish the Association," notes van Luyk, "as well as for the enhanced cost share funding to help make environmental improvements on our farms."

Funding available through the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation was added to opportunities already provided through cost share programs associated with the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan (EFP). These programs are supported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) under the Agricultural Policy Framework. The Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition (OFEC) leads agricultural support for the programs which are delivered through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA).

Educational and financial opportunities available through EFP have allowed Van Luyk to do more than would have been possible otherwise. "I have the highest respect for the OSCIA staff in their efforts to host workshops, encourage new ideas and facilitate access to the various funding sources available to help implement BMPs," says van Luyk.

Van Luyk has received GFSP funding for several projects. To improve his product and waste management efforts he installed a concrete pad next to his pesticide storage facility. The pad slopes towards a sump that can contain a spill, should one occur while handling pesticides or filling spraying equipment. Another concrete pad outside his vegetable storage facility contains any drainage from his vegetable cull piles.

A second project involved modification of his spraying equipment with air induction nozzles for more efficient and effective pesticide application.

GFSP funding has also enabled Van Luyk to expand the use of cover crops over a greater acreage. He seeds barley with carrot seed and onion seedlings to reduce wind erosion of the soil until the crop has established. After the crop is harvested, barley is again seeded down to hold the soil until replanting the following spring.

The GFSP funding support to 75 per cent of total costs was more than welcome. A maximum of \$10,000 per farm business was available under GFSP. However, that hasn't kept Van Luyk from undertaking projects with lower levels of cost-share. Through the Canada-Ontario EFP cost share programs alone, Van Luyk has completed several other projects.

To better manage crop residue and save on energy costs, Van Luyk added a forage chopper to his carrot combine. Carrot tops are chopped and left on the field as residue, adding organic matter to the soil, reducing waste handling and holding the soil against wind erosion. To deal with invasive alien plant species he modified a mower to control leafy spurge, and to increase efficiency of his irrigation system for nutrient delivery, he installed fertigation equipment.

While the GFSP is now complete, its success is a terrific example of what can be achieved through collaboration. A new program, the Lake Simcoe Farm Stewardship Program (LSFSP), is offering substantial top-up funding for both small and larger scale projects. Van Luyk plans to participate in this program as well. Projects he's considering include low pressure boom irrigation, an expanded cover crop program, ditch bank restoration for erosion control, cull pad at a separate storage barn, and improved fuel storage.

Producers are encouraged to speak to local OSCIA Program Representatives for updated information on the EFP and current cost share programs.

Van Luyk believes the EFP and cost share funding are of utmost importance. "Today's farmers are proud to work towards a healthy future for all. The EFP has received tremendous uptake from the farming community because it supports, through financial incentives, what farmers have been doing all along – providing a diversity of crops, reviewing best management practices as knowledge changes, and understanding the essential nature of agriculture within society."

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For further information and photos of Doug Van Luyk and his projects please contact the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at www.ontariosoilcrop.org or 1-800-265-9751.