



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **First-Time Farmer Taps Into Environmental Cost Share Programs**

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It was the deteriorating split rail fences that helped seal the deal for Chris Porter. More than a decade ago, along with wife Dorothy Duffus-Bolton, Porter had been looking for some land in the Brockville area where he had been working at the regional psychiatric hospital. Porter's retirement dream included a little hobby farming although, at 55 years old, he had never farmed before.

The couple eventually went to check out a listing north of the small St. Lawrence Seaway city, a 100-acre parcel in Elizabeth-Kitley Township, complete with an old house featuring all of its original characteristics and, as a bonus, a sugar shack set in a maple woodlot.

Unfortunately, the 7<sup>th</sup> Concession gravel road separated the 100 acres from 50 more with the original farm's outbuildings which were sold to someone else. And the sandy loam covering much of the acreage was too thin and rocky to grow crops.

But more than 10 years later, sections of the carefully plotted Porter property look like a nature preserve; other sections are park-like pristine. In fact, with its protected marsh, ponds, 5,000 new tree plantings acquired primarily through the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority, groomed land, fenced fields, and sugar bush, all fronted by a magnificent heritage home, the Porter place delivers an immediate soothing effect.

Cedar rail fences, some of them dating back to the early 1800s, crisscross the property. But that's only a small part of the containment effort completed so the cattle he keeps seasonally can be separated from the sugar bush, a wetland at the south end of the property, the ongoing rehabilitation project, and the two ponds installed with the help of hired equipment.

Some 1,800 feet of page wire fencing have been put in to supplement the cedar rails, enclosing three fields where Porter's small summer Hereford herd engages in rotational grazing before being sold in the fall.

The process of introducing new Best Management Practices (BMP) to the farm was expedited when he discovered the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) was delivering environmental cost share programs to registered farms, and were prepared to help cover a portion of the cost of his project... along with several other improvements.

After completing his Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and applying for the associated cost-share, Porter's project was deemed eligible for funding enhancement through the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) Species At Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP), also delivered by the OSCIA. Porter credits his OSCIA Program Representative, Rita Vogel, with providing sound advice through regular visits to help establish and monitor his project.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources recognizes the importance of voluntary stewardship actions by farmers and others in protecting species at risk and their essential habitats. SARFIP funding complements the cost-share program associated with EFP, assisting producers who adopt BMP contributing to a healthy local environment.

Cost-share funding associated with the Canada-Ontario EFP makes the wheels turn. The current EFP and the Canada-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program is supported through Growing Forward by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), under the Best Practices suite. MNR has renewed their financial commitment to SARFIP which ensures the enhancement opportunities are in place for 2009.

Many of the same BMPs that lead to environmental sustainability also encourage farm production and profitability. Eligible projects include marsh and stream-side management, tree shelterbelts, habitat enhancement, and erosion prevention.

To date, about \$20,000 worth of environmental enhancement has been completed on the Porter spread, with the owner tapping into programs covering about half of the costs. Porter is pleased with the SARFIP partnership which has turned his property into an environmental showplace.

Among Porter's improvements was a small fuel storage containment structure for which he received partial compensation. He has capitalized on the farm's natural features, creating the ponds on the edge of the marsh where they're fed by the same shallow aquifer, and capping an unused well to keep out contamination... but not permanently so it can be opened again in the future if needed.

"My approach is that, if you're going to own land, you have to put something back into it," says a proud Chris Porter who, at 62, often works from sunup to sundown improving his property.

"Farming is an expensive business," adds Duffus-Bolton who helped with the funding program applications. "Every bit of help you can get counts... especially when you're first-time farmers."

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For more information on the programs, or photographs of Chris Porter and his projects, contact Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at 519-826-4214 or [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org)

For more information on Species at Risk, please visit [www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)