



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**Native Grass Planting Adds Diversity to Huron County Farm**

*For Immediate Release*  
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*Prepared by Lois Sinclair for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association*

Huron County producer, Jim Ginn, thinks he has found the solution to adding more ecological diversity to his 315-acre farm west of Clinton. A 4-acre field parcel perched high on a slope draining to a cold-water stream feeding the Maitland River is virtually surrounded by trees. It is difficult to access for pasture and the site is not easily accessible to water for the farm's purebred Red Angus cow/calf herd. The agricultural potential was limited, and hawthorns were beginning to take over. Planting more trees was an option, but the farm already had more than 100 acres of forested area, so Ginn looked for a different option, knowing that the more variety of habitat on his farm, the more variety of wildlife he could attract.

Native grasses provided the answer and with access to good technical assistance and some appealing cost share opportunities, Ginn was well on his way.

Ginn is no stranger to environmental accomplishments. His work began in 1988 with his first block planting of White pine. In 1999 he planted 50 American chestnut seedlings as part of a program coordinated by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) aimed at bringing attention to the plight of the threatened tree species. Various other projects include conservation tillage, barnyard runoff containment, fencing cattle from water courses and woodland management. It wasn't long before others were taking notice of the Ginn family's determination to blend production needs with environmental desires. In 2004 they received a Countryside Canada national recognition award from the Canadian Wildlife Fund for the numerous environmental stewardship projects on their farm.

The idea to establish native grasses came from a tour he attended in the Norfolk area a couple of years ago, organized by the local Stewardship Council. One of the farms visited featured native flower and grass plantings, with soils quite similar to the sand and gravel found on his own farm. Ginn liked what he saw. With encouragement from the Huron Stewardship Council, Ginn agreed to try the deep-rooted warm season grasses on his 4-acre parcel.

He had already completed an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and had his Action Plan peer reviewed and deemed appropriate by the local committee appointed by OSCIA. That made him eligible for the associated Canada-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program (COFSP). EFP activity has been funded in recent years by the Agriculture Policy Framework supported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). OSCIA delivers the EFP program on behalf of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition (OFEC).

In addition to the federal offerings, it turned out the project Ginn completed was also eligible for funding under a new initiative announced in the fall of 2008 by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). The Species At Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP) provided a significant boost in the cost share for selected Best Management Practices (BMPs) linked to EFP. The same project proposal application submitted to OSCIA for the federal funding triggered the cost share allocation through SARFIP.

MNR recognizes the importance of the farm community's voluntary stewardship actions in the protection of species at risk and their essential habitats. SARFIP was introduced to further relieve some of the producer investment required to implement these projects on the farm.

The site was prepared by spraying a non-selective herbicide on the old pasture in the fall and again in the spring. The Rural Lambton Stewardship Network acquired the native seed and conducted the planting. Some examples of native flowers planted at the site are Black Eyed Susan, Sweet Ox Eye and Round Headed Bush clover. Grasses include Switch grass, Indian grass and Little Bluestem.

The native prairie forbs (flowers) and the warm season, deep-rooted grasses will continue to spread and provide habitat for ground nesting birds. Prairie ecosystems attract a wide array of wildlife species, some of which are predators to many agricultural crop pests. Research is finding economic benefit to adjacent croplands from their presence.

Ginn is most curious to see the site develop and mature. He would advise anyone interested in a similar project to contact their local stewardship council or MNR office for their suggestions and guidance.

Cost share support through the COFSP and SARFIP is expected to continue in 2009. Find out more by contacting the local OSCIA Program Representative or visit the web site at [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org)

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For further information and project photos please contact the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org) or 1-800-265-9751

For more information about species at risk in Ontario, please visit [www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)