Grassroots Innovation
Since 1939

OSCIA PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Message from the President - Gord Green

Hi Everyone,

I would like to welcome you to our first newsletter of the New Year.

Meeting season is winding down and spring is just around the corner. This last winter we had excellent attendance at the various county, district and regional meetings around the province. Events such as FarmSmart and South West Agricultural Conference (SWAC) had record attendance.

The agricultural industry is fully engaged in gathering information on new ideas and how to do things better. Our program workshops are enjoying a large increase in uptake which has kept local and provincial staff hopping to keep up. These are excellent workshops and the increased interest demonstrates our concern for the environment and agriculture in general.

Our Provincial Annual Meeting was a success with very good speakers and presentations. The Tier 1 and Tier 2 presentations given at the annual meeting were great and they demonstrated the diversity of the projects being done across the province. I would encourage the locals and regions to apply for a Tier 1 project for this coming year. It is very easy to do but pre-approval is required. It is a very broad based grant so just about any membership enhancement project will qualify. We now have a new OSCIA Soil Champion in the person of Tyler Vollmershausen from Oxford County. Dean Glenney, the 2015 Soil Champion from Haldimand County gave an excellent presentation on his farm operation at the Annual Meeting. Another great presentation was from the 2015 Forage Master Chris Brown from Lennox & Addington. Cover crops and phosphorus algae blooms were the main guest speaker topics. It is interesting that the solution to the problems of phosphorus leaving our fields, greenhouse cap and trade credits, and overall soil health improvements all have the same solutions. These would be reduced tillage or no-till and the use of cover crops. Just something to think about.

On a bit of a sad note, we have decided to suspend the Forage Masters program for this year. We are in the process of retooling the program to give it a new face and try to address some of its shortcomings. A weakness of the current program is that it was addressing forage that pertained solely to the dairy industry. As a grassroots association, we recognize the importance of all the forage based livestock industries out there and would like to come up with something that is relevant to all sectors. If you have thoughts on improving the program, please contact your provincial director. We have a great group of provincial directors across the province who, besides representing their own areas at the provincial level, also represent the province on various committees pertaining to agriculture. In some cases these people are the only farm representatives at the table.

I wish everyone a good planting season and a prosperous cropping year. Be safe out there and enjoy the experience.

Yours in Agriculture,

Gordon R. Green

Gord Green, OSCIA President

A NEWSLETTER TO UPDATE OSCIA MEMBERS, PRESIDENTS, SECRETARIES, TREASURERS, DIRECTORS, AND OMAFRA AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT CONTACTS

In this Issue

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association
1 Stone Road West, Guelph ON N1G 4Y2
Phone: (519) 826-4214 or 1-800-265-9751
Fax: (519) 826-4224
E-mail: oscia@ontariosoilcrop.org
Website: www.ontariosoilcrop.org

Blake Vince Talks Cover Crops at the 2016 OSCIA Annual Meeting (AGM)

Blake Vince has never plowed a field in his life. His father and former OSCIA President, Elwin Vince, went no-till in 1983 and the family hasn't looked back. The Chatham area farmer is innovating on their 1,300 acres and shared his thoughts on agriculture and conservation with AGM participants on February 10th in London, Ontario.

He starts his presentation with the all too familiar photo of a green Lake Erie, but draws a poignant connection as he points to an area in the lake. "This is a water intake pipe, this is my family's drinking water, my wife, my kids and myself," he starts.

Vince was selected as a Nuffield Scholar and wrote on the topic: Conserving farm land with cover crops and the importance of biodiversity (2014). He traveled to Europe and South America exploring soil, cover crops and no-till farming practices.

He points to the vast array of technology and the pace at which things are changing, and wonders why young people are still taught to plow. Vince believes the technology of the plow is obsolete now that our understanding of soil has evolved over the years. He quotes Edward Faulkner who said, all the way back in 1942, "There is no scientific evidence to support the need for tillage."

Active on Twitter, Vince coined the now-popular 'hashtag' #RootsNotIron and it was based on a conversation he had with an Ohio farmer and mentor, Dave Brandt. "I can do more with roots than you can with any machine," Brandt had challenged. And from then on, Blake Vince was hooked on the notion of incorporating cover crops into his no-till system.

He says that when no-till was first conceptualized here in Ontario, it focused only on the iron and didn't include the most important piece. "Almost all advantages of the no-till system come from the permanent cover of the soil and only a few from not tilling the soil. Always aim at full cover," Vince quotes Rolf Derpsh, a farmer from Paraguay that he visited on his Nuffield trip.

On his trip he found people using various methods to use living roots to transform soil, including planting cover crops into soybeans at senescence, or growing crops and grazing animals between rows of eucalyptus. In France he met Frédéric Thomas, who struggled with soils that were sandy on the top with a clay layer below. While other farmers used deep tillage to invert the soil, Thomas was having much better results using plant roots to transform the soil.

Vince flips to a slide of him planting corn in 2014. It is a photo that now has farmers across Ontario intrigued, because Vince is taking his John Deere 7000-series planter through a field that is knee high with hairy vetch, cereal rye and crimson clover. "There is no fertilizer in the tank and nothing special on the planter, just heavy duty down-pressure springs and notched closing wheels on the back. There is no lead coulter," says Vince, who has tinkered with his planter to make it work on his operation.

"I had all the neighbours watching me," he says, as he crossed his heart and plunged into a green field. Vince often speaks to the fear that farmers have of change and says that the largest compaction zone on a farm is usually between the ears.

But to Vince, this is a no brainer. He is visibly improving soil health and water infiltration, reducing erosion and making money. He says that we often focus on increasing production to make a profit, but rarely talk about a reduction of consumption. He was dumbstruck when Dave Brandt first told him that he used only 90 lbs of Nitrogen to grow 180 bushel corn, because Vince was using almost twice that much. Since then, Vince has been increasing organic matter and reducing fertilizer application rates with no yield losses. But a salesman won't tell you that. Vince argues that "If it isn't in a jug, if it isn't in a bag, if it isn't covered in shiny paint, then the industry isn't interested in talking about it."

Vince has been experimenting with different cover crop mixes and concludes that it's not about density but diversity. With more varieties of seed in the mix, he gets better cover of the field and while there may not be as much biomass in the above-ground portion of some plants, he is more concerned with their roots and exudates that benefit the soil.

Last year, OMAFRA's Anne Verhallen used his field to do the cotton test with a pair of cotton briefs and the results were undeniable. The cotton had been consumed by micro-organisms; whereas the pair buried just a few feet over in the neighbor's field was nearly intact. "While this isn't the most scientific method, we can clearly see that something is happening beneath the soil that most of us don't understand," he says.

Vince quotes Einstein who said, "Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act." And he goes on to say, "I know that we, collectively as an industry, can do better than what we are doing today. We need to stop treating soil like dirt and start treating it like the living and breathing organism it is."

By keeping his fields green, Blake Vince is capturing solar energy and feeding soil biology, increasing organic matter, infiltration rates and water holding capacity and fertilizer application rates. By decreasing soil and nutrient losses, he is improving the quality of the Great Lakes. And that's something we will all benefit from.

Melisa Luymes, Heartland Regional Communication Coordinator

2016 OSCIA Soil Champion Award Winner

OSCIA is proud to announce the 2016 OSCIA Soil Champion Award winner, **Tyler Vollmershausen, of Vollmershausen Farms.**

Tyler Vollmershausen (2nd from the right) and his father, Larry (centre), pictured with OSCIA 2016 President, Gord Green (right), Lillie Ann Morris and Don Lobb (Sponsors).

Tyler, a sixth generation cash crop farmer from Oxford county, is the third recipient of the OSCIA Soil Champion Award. This annual award was initiated by Don Lobb and Lillie Ann Morris who are both very well known for their passion towards soil conservation and soil health. Researchers, extension staff and conservation-minded farmers are increasingly concerned about soil erosion. It is important to direct attention to those who have excelled in the use and promotion of best management practices.

The OSCIA Soil Champion Award was given to Vollmershausen Farms for their passion for improving soil health, and their use of cover crops, to name just a few reasons. For the full article on Tyler Vollmershausen and his family farm, please visit our website at: http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/association/association-soil-champion-award/

Do you know someone worthy of the title Soil Champion? The submission deadline for the 2017 Award is September 1, 2016.

For the application form and more details, visit: http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/association/

Amber Van De Peer, Executive Assistant, OSCIA

CROP ADVANCES

Applied Research on Soil & Crop Management information available on the OSCIA website:

http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/research-resources/crop-advances/

SARFIP Update

The Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP) was delivered by your Association for the eighth consecutive season in 2015.

Under this year's SARFIP, 113 on-farm projects were completed and received cost-share support. From alternate watering systems to keep livestock out of natural areas, to human-made habitat structures for Species At Risk (SAR) like bat boxes or barn swallow structures, SARFIP provided up to 80% to producers.

Rotational grazing system, funded by SARFIP in 2015

Stay tuned for new opportunities through SARFIP in the 2016-17 program year starting this spring.

For more information, visit: www.ontariosoilcrop.org

Farmland Health Check-Up Update

Farm businesses in the Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair watersheds, and the Lake Huron southeast shores watershed, now have the opportunity to work with a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) to complete a Farmland Health Check-Up. The Check-Up represents $500 value but the service is provided to the farm business at no charge thanks to the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI). Cost-share funding will be available to implement best management practices identified in the assessment by the CCA beginning April 4, 2016. The coupon is valid as annual program budgets allow, through January 2018.

GLASI is supported through *Growing Forward 2*, a federal, provincial, territorial initiative.

For more information, visit: www.ontariosoilcrop.org or email: GLASI@ontariosoilcrop.org

GF2 Cost Share Funding available for improved nutrient management

New manure spreader technology is helping farmers take advantage of the benefits of applying livestock nutrients on the land, while also reducing their environmental impact.

Responsible use of these nutrients contribute to the healthy soils that farmers need to grow crops, allowing them to be recycled and reused in a beneficial manner.

Solid manure spreaders with vertically arranged beaters–instead of the more conventional horizontal system–have a wide-spread pattern and are good at breaking up material before it goes on the field. This results in better, more even distribution, and lower nutrient application rates.

Russell Clark is a dairy farmer near the small town of Woodville in the Kawartha Lakes area west of Lindsay, Ontario. His farm is in the Lake Simcoe watershed, meaning all creeks, streams and rivers in that region ultimately drain into Lake Simcoe.

With over 400,000 residents in the watershed and the lake providing safe drinking water to seven municipalities, maintaining good water quality is important. This includes ensuring that livestock manure and the valuable nutrients it contains for crop production and soil health stay on the fields and out of the water courses.

When it came time to buy a new manure spreader for his farm, Clark made the decision to use vertical beater technology and turned to *Growing Forward 2* for cost-shared assistance with his investment.

"We use a lot of straw for bedding and the vertical beaters chew up manure really finely without any big lumps, giving us fine and even application on the field," he explains, adding the wide-spread pattern distributes manure in a range of 25 to 30 feet or approximately seven to nine meters.

Traditional horizontal beaters have a narrow spread width and the vertical beater's wider spread pattern results in fewer tractor passes over a field. This helps reduce emissions, fuel consumption, and soil compaction.

A research study by the AgTech Centre in Lethbridge, Alberta comparing types and models of solid manure spreaders showed that the manure method of application is very important when it comes to getting the most out of spreading manure or compost on the land.

A uniform spread pattern means manure and its nutrients are evenly spread on the field; non-uniform patterns can impact crop germination and cause crop burn or nutrient deficiency from too many or not enough nutrients in one spot.

Clark says that in his experience, the fine consistency of manure spread with a vertical beater makes it easier to work into the ground after application. This makes the technology well-suited to reduced or no-till systems.

Program Coordinator Barb Caswell with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) says farmers can access cost-shared support for nutrient management projects under the Environment and Climate Change Adaptation focus area of *Growing Forward 2*.

Vertical beaters and slurry guards for manure spreaders are examples of items eligible for support through the Land Application of Manure project category.

So are expenditures for rate monitors, sensors and flow meters for liquid manure equipment; scales to weigh solid manure spreading equipment going to field; spreader tank agitators to keep solids in suspension; remote shut-off devices for direct flow manure application systems; and surface inlet control valves, sentinel tiles, tile outlet markers, and monitoring equipment to detect and prevent manure from moving into tile drains.

To be eligible, farms must be located in the Lake Erie, Lake St Clair, Lake Huron or Lake Simcoe Watersheds or a designated source protection area such as a Well Head Protection Area A or B, Intake Protection Zone 1 or 2 or a Remedial Action Plan area.

As well, farmers must have completed a third or fourth edition Environmental Farm Plan workshop and Action Plan Review within the last five years. A project has to be identified as an action in that plan to move a "1" or "2" rating to a "3" or "4" (best) rating in order to be considered eligible for cost share, adds Caswell.

Growing Forward 2 is a federal-provincial-territorial initiative aimed at encouraging innovation, competitiveness, market development, adaptability, and industry capacity in Canada's agri-food and agri-products sector.

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association administers *Growing Forward 2* educational workshops and funding assistance to farmers.

More information about *Growing Forward 2* funding opportunities for farmers is available at: http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/en/programs/growing_forward_2_new.htm or by contacting the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's regional program leads at: http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/en/programs/workshop_leaders.htm.

Lilian Schaer, Freelance writer for OSCIA