

## Soil Smart 2015

Following on the heels of the highly successful Corn Smart (2012) and Soy Smart (2013), the FarmSmart organization continued the full day Friday programming with a session on soil health. 2015 has been named by the FAO as the International Year of Soil, making the timing of Soil Smart particularly appropriate.



More than 450 producers and agribusiness personnel participated in the full day program in Waterloo while an additional 35 people participated via WebEx from locations in Thunder Bay, Earlton and Verner Ontario. Ray Archuleta, a well-known Soil Health Specialist with the USDA NRCS from North Carolina, anchored the program. He talked about the importance of soil health and practices that support better soil health. He brought along a series of interactive pieces that really demonstrated the impact of better soil health. Ray was able to select from a number of Ontario soils that had been collected by the OMAFRA Soil Team for this event, illustrating the importance of crop rotation, reduced tillage and the use of cover crops.

Dr. Bill Deen presented information from the Ontario long term rotation and tillage trials in support of the concepts that had been presented by other speakers and also raised the aspect of changing weather and corn hybrids, resulting in a need for soils that are better able to store water for crop use.

During the breaks and the lunch hour, Soil Smart participants were able to visit with a number of sponsors and try some hands on demonstration stations that the OMAFRA Soil Team had developed. The interactive soil information website Ag Maps, a soil profile, water erosion, soil texturing and the new residue app were featured.

The afternoon program focused on the experiences and recommendations of farmers. Jeff Rasaweher, a farmer and cover crop supplier from Michigan, spoke to his experiences with reducing tillage and other inputs. His soils have become healthier through rotation and cover crops. Ken Nixon, Ilderton and Earl Elgie, Dresden explained the approach to improving and maintaining soil health on their farms. The Soil Smart program concluded with a full audience asking questions of a lively panel of speakers.

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