

## Healthy Soils, Healthy Farms, Healthy Environment (H-3) Project (ECSCIA - Interim Report)

### Purpose:

An education and awareness campaign targeted to farmers in east central region SCIA toward two best management practices (BMPs) related to agricultural soils (soil testing and cover crops). The project will evaluate the effectiveness of the awareness campaign and the peer-to-peer interaction through gate signs and farmer to farmer discussions at getting farmers to implement BMPs in this area. In addition, the project will support further investigation by the OMAFRA Soil Fertility Specialist on the role of sulfur as a crop nutrient under Ontario conditions.

### Methods:

The launch of the H3 Project included:

- brief presentations to York SCIA BBQ and Peterborough SCIA Tillage Day in August 2012
- Information at Hastings County Plowing Match
- East Central SCIA Press release and article in the EC SCIA newsletter
- Presentations made to the 4 SCIA Annual Meetings in east central region in January 2013 about the H3 project

### Soil Sampling Procedure:

1. Farmer agrees to have soil sampling conducted through the H-3 project by contacting the OMAFRA Environmental Specialist in Brighton to participate. Farmer agrees to pay for base analysis for soil sampling (\$12.00 + \$1.56 HST = 13.56 per sample which will require a cheque payable to "A&L Canada Laboratories Inc"
2. The H-3 projects will pay for the sulfur and organic matter portion of the test (\$2.70 + HST)
3. Farmer + soil sampler meet to discuss fields and location. OMAFRA prepares map(s) of property(ies) and field locations
4. Sampling procedure will follow OMAFRA recommendations for soil sampling found at [http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/nm/regs/sampro/sampro02\\_09.htm#1](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/nm/regs/sampro/sampro02_09.htm#1) and the general recommendation is for 1 composite or representative sample per 25 acres. However, the farmer will have the "final say" if he/she wishes to deviate from the 1/25 acre recommendation.
5. Collect samples and send to for lab analysis.
6. Attend the H-3 winter meeting to discuss the results (January 29, 2013 in Lindsay with Bonnie Ball, OMAFRA)

**Results:**

Soil testing

- 9 farms have participated (7 in Peterborough County, 1 in Durham Region and 1 in City of Kawartha Lakes). These 9 farms account for approximately 2400 with approximately 55% of field area of participating farms being sampled.
- 51 composite samples were submitted to A & L Canada Laboratories for analysis.
- Seven additional farmers have signed up for future sampling in 2013
- Cover crops: no farmers have signed up to date

**Summary:**

The project is close to meeting its objective for year 1 for soil testing (goal was 10 farmers participating). Preliminary results show, with the exception of one farm, that P and K levels are low on participating farms (80% of fields sampled are less than 20 ppm P [bicarb extraction] and less than 100 ppm K).

Information related to sulfur will be provided to Bonnie Ball, OMAFRA Soil Fertility Specialist for future interpretation.

No farmers signed up for the cover crop component of the H3 project. The reason is that there is no trigger or financial incentive for a producer to voluntarily sign up for the cover crop aspect to the project. However, the acceptance and awareness of cover crops in this area has increased noticeably in 2012. Peterborough SCIA held a cover crops demonstration day in October 2012 at Frank and Julia Hoftzyer's farm and Durham SCIA featured cover crop trials at a number of farms in 2012 but these initiatives were independent of the H3 project.

**Next Steps:**

- January 29 meeting with participating farmers and Bonnie Ball in Lindsay to review results from 2012 soil sampling.
- March 6 and 7, East Central Farm Show – encourage farmers to sign up for 2013 and 14
- Coordinate sampling with farmers that have signed up (approximately 50 farmers to date)

**Acknowledgements:**

- The project team would like to thank the following partners: Participating farmers (9 that have had samples collected and 7 that have signed up for future sampling); York, Durham, CKL and Peterborough SCIA; Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association; Brittany Barkes, Jr. Nutrient Management Technician, OMAFRA; East Central SCIA and Neil Moore; Bonnie Ball and Joel Bagg, OMAFRA and A & L Canada Laboratories.

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