



March 2019 Edition

# OSCIA PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

## Message from the President – Les Nichols



I would like to thank the OSCIA membership for the honour to serve as your president for 2019. This is the 80<sup>th</sup> year of existence for OSCIA and the organization still remains very close to its original mandate – “Facilitate responsible economic management of soil, water, air and crops through development and

communication of innovative farming practices”. Our membership continues to be leaders in development and adaptation of leading-edge soil health and cropping practices. I also believe that OSCIA is unique in that although it is usually perceived as a “crop” organization, in reality it is very much a “crop and livestock” organization that values the inter-relationship between the crop and livestock sectors especially in relation to crop production.

In response to member resolutions at past annual conferences, requesting the board to investigate alternate or more central/eastern locations for our annual conference, the 2019 OSCIA annual conference was held in early February in historic Kingston. The facility was very suitable and hotel staff were very friendly and accommodating. The attendance was strong, and feedback was positive. As well as a change in venue we elected to make some changes to our typical conference format. These changes included beginning the conference at 8:15AM on Tuesday and finishing in the early afternoon on Wednesday. This meant moving the ceremony portion to the Tuesday reception dinner rather than holding a Wednesday banquet. We hope those who were able to attend the 2019 annual conference found these changes to be positive.

Delegates of the annual conference also had a unique opportunity to take part in an engaging skills development workshop led by renowned mental health researcher Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton from the University of Guelph. Her presentation was titled *Mental Health in Canadian Farmers: cultivating wellness for a stronger future*. “Helplessness and hopelessness set the stage for mental health issues,” said Dr. Jones-Bitton. Overcoming these feelings requires resilience, and delegates were assured that resilience is a skill that can be learned. “It’s up to us, and it’s going to take some work.” Dr. Jones-Bitton’s presentation and a copy of the handout materials are now posted on our website:

[https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OSCIA-2019\\_reduced.pdf](https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OSCIA-2019_reduced.pdf)

The Lamplighter Inn in London is booked for the 2020 annual conference in early February of 2020. The Board will continue to investigate and assess suitable alternate venues.

OSCIA is very pleased with the recent announcement of a Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) funding intake from March 22 to May 6 and for those in Lake Erie watershed a LEADS intake opens on March 22. I would encourage all members to check the OSCIA website on a regular basis for updates on these programs and other potential new opportunities.

As “Plant 2019” is quickly approaching I would like to wish you all a safe and productive planting season. I know the local and regional Soil and Crop groups from across the province are working on plans for numerous field days, demo plots, bus tours, and other events. I strongly encourage you to attend these events and take a neighbour with you. These are always great learning opportunities as well as providing a little social time with neighbours, friends and local ag-business personal.

Les Nichols, OSCIA 2019 President

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER, ISSUED  
ALONGSIDE 11 REGIONAL NEWSLETTERS AND  
OMAFRA CROP TALK, TO UPDATE SOIL AND CROP  
MEMBERS

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## 2019 OSCIA Provincial Board of Directors



Back row (L-R): Brain Hall, Andrew Brekveld, Phil Oegema, Steve Sickle, Chad Anderson, Andy van Niekerk, Paul Hagey, Hugh Berges, and Mark Burnham.

Front row (L-R): Birgit Martin, Warren Schneckeburger, Peter McLaren, Les Nichols, Stuart Wright, Andrew Graham, and Eleanor Renaud

### Regions represented by your Board Members:

<b>Honorary President</b> – Brian Hall	<b>Executive Director</b> – Andrew Graham
<b>OMAFRA Representative</b> – Hugh Berges	<b>Eastern Valley</b> – Warren Schneckeburger
<b>East Central</b> – Paul Hagey	<b>Georgian Central</b> – Les Nichols
<b>Golden Horseshoe</b> – Steve Sickle	<b>Heartland</b> – Stuart Wright
<b>North Eastern</b> – Birgit Martin	<b>North Western</b> – Andrew Brekveld
<b>Ottawa-Rideau</b> – Eleanor Renaud	<b>Quinte</b> – Mark Burnham
<b>St. Clair</b> – Chad Anderson	<b>Thames Valley</b> – Phil Oegema

OSCIA, founded in 1939, is a unique not-for-profit grassroots farm organization, comprised of more than 50 local associations and a membership of over 4,000 producers that reflects all major sectors. OSCIA is farmers actively seeking, testing and adopting optimal farm production and stewardship practices. Our number one applied research priority is soil health.



More information available March 5

Apply for cost-share funding  
March 22 – May 6









## OSCIA Soil Health Graduate Scholarship

Established in 2014 in partnership with the University of Guelph, OSCIA is proud to present an annual Soil Health Graduate Scholarship to a deserving student.

This scholarship is in the amount of \$10,000 and is to be used towards research focusing on soil health. The recipient is selected by the University of Guelph and is presented their scholarship at an evening awards ceremony. OSCIA has had the pleasure of sending a representative to these ceremonies, in order to present the scholarship to the various recipients over the last several years.

Each year we invite the previous year’s winner to present their initial findings at the OSCIA annual conference. As well, we invite the newly awarded recipient to the annual conference, to be introduced and welcomed to OSCIA.

The 2018 OSCIA Soil Health Graduate Scholarship was awarded to Hannagala Jeewan Kumara.



2019 OSCIA President, Les Nichols (left) presenting scholarship to Hannagala Jeewan Kumara

Jeewan’s research will focus on the formation of recalcitrant soil organic matter which is the largest terrestrial carbon pool. In the coming three years he will be looking specifically at the role of soil microorganisms in forming recalcitrant soil organic matter. The knowledge he hopes to gain will be very important in planning sustainable agricultural production strategies.

Previous scholarship winners include:

- 2015 – Jaelyn Clark
- 2016 – Jordan Graham
- 2017 – Pedro Ferrari MacHado

*Written by Amber Van De Peer, Executive Assistant*

## 2019 OSCIA Soil Champions

The Soil Champion is an annual award that recognizes strong advocates of sustainable soil management. Individuals from one of two general groups can be nominated:

- 1) Those engaged in practical agriculture in developing, using and promoting management that contributes to the sustainable productivity of the soil; or,
- 2) Research or extension professionals whose work demonstrates a commitment to advancing soil health and productive sustainability.

This year OSCIA is proud to announce two very worthy Soil Champions, a Middlesex County farmer and a long-time provincial government soil specialist. This is the first year a winner has been selected in both eligible categories.

Jim Denys farms in Middlesex County, producing pork in a farrow to finish system and cash cropping mainly corn, wheat and soybeans. Today, the Denys family is focused on building soil structure and organic matter through the use of cover crops and strip tilling.

Anne Verhallen, Soil Management Specialist for Horticulture Crops, OMAFRA, first joined the ministry in the late 1980s and is a long-time advocate for soil health. She played a key role in launching the popular Southwest Ag Conference (SWAC) and more recently helped get the “Soil Your Undies” campaign off the ground as part of her extension work and ongoing efforts to help people visualize soil.



2019 Soil Champion winners Jim Denys and Anne Verhallen

You can find the full story, along with others on the OSCIA website: <https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/news/>

Written by Amber Van De Peer along with excerpts from Press Release ‘Ontario Farmer and Soil Extension Specialist Honoured as 2019 Soil Champions’

## Timothy, The Slender Grass with Fat Economic Return

If we consider a cover crop as anything that covers the soil to make it green versus bare dirt, we can almost consider all plants as having the capability of being utilized as a cover crop. Cover crops are being utilized deliberately and proactively as a mainstream better management practice across Ontario by farmers who recognize the agronomic benefits and the province supports this. Even with cost-sharing opportunities, many producers still find themselves at odds with one common concern: how do you quantify and capture a return on investment from investing in cover crops? After listening to Chris Martin from Marhaven Agri Inc. speak recently at the 2019 OSCIA annual conference in Kingston, it really laid some considerations on the table on what we consider a cover crop and avenues of revenue for innovative integration of cover crops into a cash crop rotation.

Martin is a member of the Ontario Forage Council (OFC) and has been farming with his family in Alma for several generations. What sparked my own interest in his presentation was the idea that a cover crop could produce a direct revenue stream, not just an anecdotal agronomic benefit or observation of an enhanced return on the “cash” crop that follows. The cover crop species of choice for Martin is...timothy (*Phleum pratense*). Why timothy you ask? I wondered the same. The answer, according to Martin, is marketability. He suggests we consider the difference between swamp forage and high-quality forage and the opportunities for each as livestock feed. Readily available nutritionally complete baled timothy forage has very hungry markets in the southern US and among the United Arab Emirates who seek the highest quality grass forages for their horses, camels, and other livestock, but due to desert like growing conditions are unable to produce the high-quality feed themselves.

Martin agrees that wheat after soybeans suits fine in a rotation and is also an excellent cover crop option; however, his recent field trial showed that when timothy replaced wheat in rotation followed by soybeans in a double crop placement, timothy beat out wheat. This slender grass noticeably fattened up Martin’s revenue stream on June 11, 2018 when he harvested 5,700 lb. of solid stand dry timothy hay. As soon as the bales were removed from the field he no-tilled solid stand soybeans into the stubble and on October 12 harvested 55-bushel soybeans. Let’s look at the math. I encourage everyone to do their own fertility analysis and ROI on crop, assuming market value during this time period and according to Martin’s presentation, there was \$684 per acre of premium high-quality timothy hay produced and \$660 per acre of soybean production from one field. Why is this important? Many farmers in Ontario still

stick with continuous soybean production because the ground conditions are not suitable early enough to plant corn, therefore, including timothy in this rotation not only adds winter vegetation to the system which keeps the soil covered but it also appears to offer a financial return that can be achieved right before you plant your spring cash crop. I don't know about you, but cash on hand leading into planting a cash crop is an attractive feature for a cover crop in a rotation.

Martin admits there are challenges to producing a hay crop that brings 12¢ a pound, and intensive management and fertility is still important. Getting the soybeans into the ground can be challenging even in a dry spring within the critical window of time, and you will require good storage with a market that is willing to pay a premium for forage. Martin's operation goes as far as to store all quality forage bales out of direct sunlight to avoid bleaching and possible loss of quality. Even with these challenges Martin's slender timothy grass seems to be making it in a big way abroad, suggesting that the right kind of savvy grower who identifies and knows his target market and manages his operation intensively and proactively can reach premium returns on investment for their efforts to provide for these diverse niche markets. The suggestion I have is that growers try something new every year and perhaps this is it. Think outside of the box. What is a cover crop? What is a cash crop? Have you considered timothy lately?

Written by Matt Porter, East Central Region

### Crop Advances – On-going Research Resources

Looking for applied research reports? Go straight to Crop Advances on the OSCIA website. Crop Advances is compiled annually by OMAFRA field crop specialists in partnership with OSCIA, industry and academics to inform readers of new technologies, results of field trials and research. It's only available on our website and it's the best place to find information on field crop agriculture. The reports are categorized into one of six categories (canola,

cereal, corn, forage, soybeans and soil) and are presented in pdf format. All reports are conveniently organized by year, some going back to 2003. There is also a section on events that gives readers an overview of accomplishments achieved at FarmSmart, SWAC and similar activities.

Find Crop Advances under “Research and Resources” at: <https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/research-resources/crop-advances/>

### Don Hill Legacy Award Announcement

Ruth and Marilee Hill introduced the Don Hill Legacy Award last month at the OSCIA annual conference. This annual award will recognize an individual farm business who demonstrates innovation and ingenuity to effectively address an environmental risk associated with soil, water, air or biodiversity on their farm. On-line entries will be received throughout the year up to December 1, when the winning entry will be selected. The winner will receive their \$1,000 prize at the annual conference in February.



Ruth (Right) and Marilee Hill, announcing the Don Hill Legacy Award

More details on the award as well as the entry form has been added to our website and is available at: <https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/association/don-hill-legacy-award/>.

This is an initiative coordinated by OSCIA and generously funded by Ruth Hill and family. We wish to thank the Community Foundation Grey Bruce and the Rural Institute of Ontario for their expert guidance and assistance which was essential in establishing the Legacy Award.

Don's passion towards the EFP was widely known and admired. To him, the process was all about farmers sharing their experiences in support of continuous learning and discovering best management practices. He took real satisfaction in finding simple and creative solutions to environmental challenges faced on the farm. Don's passion lives on through the Legacy Award that bears his name.

Written by Andrew Graham, OSCIA Executive Director