



Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

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News Release

Ontario grain farmer, sustainable soil management professor named 2021 Soil Champions

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association honours Henry Denotter and Dr. Laura Van Eerd

For immediate release

Guelph ON, 04 February 2021 - A grain farmer from Essex County and a professor in School of Environmental Sciences at the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus have been chosen as winners of the 2021 Soil Champion Award. The annual award, which recognizes leaders in sustainable soil management, was presented by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) to Henry Denotter in the producer category and Dr. Laura Van Eerd in the research/extension category.

“We are excited to be able to present the Soil Champion Award to two recipients this year,” says Chad Anderson, OSCIA President for 2021. “Both Henry and Laura are very worthy recipients of this award and we appreciate their passion for soil health and everything they are doing to advance sustainable soil health management in Ontario.”

Henry Denotter farms with his family in southern Essex County, growing corn, soybeans, wheat and cover crops. His soil health improvement activities started decades ago when he planted his first crop of no-till soybeans on 30-inch rows. Today, he aims to be 100% no-till every year, all fields are grid soil sampled regularly and fertilizer is applied in-furrow for minimal soil disturbance.

Cover crops are a big part of Denotter’s cropping rotation, and in the last several years he’s been experimenting with buckwheat. His biggest success stories, though, have been transitioning to 20-inch rows in his no-till corn and soybeans and a modified air seeder he bought and rebuilt that is completely convertible to accommodate multiple crops and fertilizer.

“Sometimes even the smallest thing can improve soil health - every little bit can make a difference,” says Denotter. “Being selected Soil Champion is like icing on the cake. This has been part of my focus for the last 20 years and I didn’t realize how much I’d done in that time.”

Laura Van Eerd is a professor in sustainable soils management. When she first came to Ridgetown in 2003, much of her work involved nitrogen fertility in vegetable crops. Today, her big focus is on cover crops and how they influence carbon storage and soil health.

Following a sabbatical in 2013, she became among the first to publish about soil health in Canada. More recently, was invited to write the soil health chapter in an Introductory Canadian Soil Science textbook, which is expected to be released later this year. In addition to research, she's also involved in teaching and extension activities.

“When I look at the list of Soil Champions before me, I’m in awe; this is good company and I feel honoured to be part of it,” says Van Eerd, adding she’s also appreciative of the hard work of her research technicians and students who support her research.

Nominations for the 2022 Soil Champion can be submitted any time up to November 1, 2021. Visit ontariosoilcrop.org to learn more about this year’s winners and how to make a nomination.

OSCIA is a unique, not-for-profit grassroots farm organization whose mission is to facilitate responsible economic management of soil, water, air and crops through development and communication of innovative farming practices.

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