



March 2018 Edition

OSCIA PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Message from the President – Peter McLaren



This being my first message as your President it's difficult to know where to begin so I will jump right in. Anyone who attended OSCIA's 2017 Annual Conference will remember a resolution to choose a location in eastern Ontario every few years, and after this year's annual conference the Directors did vote to move the annual conference east. The 2019 Annual Conference will be in at Four Points Sheraton in Kingston, the "Limestone City".

As we approach the end of another unusual winter we all look to the spring. No way can we get three bad years in a row! But it is looking good in the short term around here; most of the snow is gone, winds are drying up the ground and warmer temperatures are bringing on the maple syrup as well as warming the ground. Fingers crossed!

Anyone attending the banquet at this year's Annual Conference will recall my presentation on the shortage of agricultural graduates to fill the job requirements of the agriculture industry. There are four times as many jobs as graduates. I feel this is something we should all get behind to promote; if it's good for agricultural business, it's good for us all. So please pass on this message to other groups or if you have the ear of the media, please get the point across to the urban population that there are a lot of well-paying jobs available for anyone wanting to enter the agricultural sector.

Everyone should know by now that the Canadian Agricultural Partnership was announced on February 13. The first intake starts on April 3 and runs for five weeks, for a seamless transition from *Growing Forward 2*. This is the first time in my memory that the new program has followed directly behind the last. Hats off to the OMAFRA staff working on it to pull it together quickly. The program guide will be available at the end of March, so read it carefully before making an application. Also, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) has announced the start of the GreenON Agriculture Program. This intake starts on March 6 and runs till March 26. It is for energy reductions in climate-controlled greenhouse and livestock buildings as well as grain dryers.

With that I will say so long for now and wish everyone a safe and on time planting season.

Until next time...

Peter McLaren, OSCIA President

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

In this Issue

- Message from the President
- Forage Masters Earn High Praise at Annual Conference
- What Can Agriculture Really Learn from Nature – Annual Conference Keynote Summary
- Operation Pollinator
- Past President Barry Hill, Ag Hall of Fame Inductee
- Farm and Food Care Update from the Annual Conference
- New Program Opportunities Upcoming

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Forage Masters Earn High Praise at Annual Conference

By the end of the evening a new provincial Forage Master was named and delegates at the OSCIA annual conference couldn't stop talking about the competition.

One year earlier a bold new approach for the decades-old program was introduced, centered on a self-assessment to identify best practices already followed and isolate where improvements could be made to boost productivity and forage quality. Four of the regional winners accepted the invitation to present a precis of their production system at the annual conference, and the delegates and guests from across the province cast secret ballots to determine the overall champion.

One of the four presenters, Harold Zettler, a beef feedlot and sheep producer representing the Georgian Central Region, described the self-assessment as “a superior full-picture product, and like anything new will take some time to grow.” He called the new approach, “an excellent resource for the farm, allowing users to measure against a standard. It's a tool that benefits the farm more than an (on-farm judging) competition.”

Larry Davis from the Golden Horseshoe Region and a long-time competitor in Forage Masters, shared his perspectives on the growing domestic and international hay export markets. He recognized the value of crop monitoring and precise record-keeping and emphasized to delegates that the new book contains high quality information that can be put to good use on the farm. “Don't be intimidated,” he said.

Grant Cowan presented via a pre-recorded video to satisfy his need to stick close by his operation in Simcoe County to accommodate lambing season. He joined in the panel discussion using Skype. Cowan was new to the Forage Masters program and saw it as a tremendous opportunity to measure and compare forage production practices, saying, “The self-assessment allowed me to clearly focus on areas needing attention.”



Doug Johnston, a Perth County dairy producer representing the Heartland Region and eventual winner of the speaking competition, shared with delegates his production formula for superior growing, harvest and storage of forages. “I very much enjoyed the new format,” said Johnston, and like the other participants, completed the self-assessment on-line. “It is a tool that challenges us and helps the next generation understand why we follow certain practices.”

The speaking competition was generously sponsored by Pro Rich Seeds of Mount Elgin in Oxford County. Each speaker received a customized vest sporting the Forage Masters emblem and the logos of all sponsors which also included General Seed Company Inc. of Alberton and SGS Agrifood Laboratories in Guelph.

The Forage Masters competition is offered again in 2018. Producers are encouraged to visit the OSCIA web site to complete the on-line self-assessment, or they may contact the Guelph office to request a hard copy. The deadline for submitting the assessment is July 15, 2018.

Written by Andrew Graham, Executive Director



Congratulations to Doug Johnston, 2018 Provincial Forage Masters Champion

What Can Agriculture Really Learn from Nature?

Andrew McGuire, from Washington State University, made a keynote presentation at the OSCIA 2018 Annual Conference on ‘What can Agriculture Really Learn from Nature?’ Nature, by definition, is unmanaged, wild lands with high biodiversity, low erosion, the recycling of nutrients and low pests. Agriculture, as defined within the scope of his presentation, is high-yield, intensive grain production (which provides 60-70% of global calories) with low biodiversity, leaky nutrient cycles and pests in a managed system. Several agricultural systems, such as grazing, pasture and agro-forestry, mimic nature more closely than this grain production system.

A primary tool to mimic nature is biodiversity—how do farmers increase biodiversity on the farm within the essentials of sustaining agricultural production (1) protect the soil (2) maintain soil fertility (3) use water efficiently (4) protect the crop. Since the main goal of agriculture is to produce food, how does an increase in biodiversity produce food?

- (1) Protect the soil. Research has shown that polycultures are not more productive than the best monoculture and that there is no evidence for higher yields in cover crop mixtures. A mixed cover crop does provide different services but at a lower level of benefit for each service. A properly selected monoculture will perform better than a polyculture; increasing biodiversity and mimicking nature will result in lower levels of biomass.

- (2) Maintain soil fertility. Can farmers reduce or eliminate fertilizer inputs? There is a 5-fold difference between what nutrients are leaving the agricultural system compared to nature; these nutrients should be replaced. Soil microbes and rotating cover crops do not add nutrients to the soil but do support the more efficient cycling of nutrients. Manure and compost can be a sustainable way for a farm to increase nutrients but is it sustainable across the industry? The US has found that the supply of manure isn't enough to meet the nitrogen and phosphorous needs across the country. The manure supply from feed crops varies from 3.6 tonnes/ha to 12.8 tonnes/ha while 0.9 tonnes/ha to 48 tonnes/ha are required to maintain soil organic matter. As an industry, manure or compost won't be enough so other inputs are necessary, which isn't reflective of nature.
- (3) Use water efficiently.
- (4) Protect the crop. For pests, nature is not as welcoming and supportive as agriculture, which has a high percentage of edible food and concentrated species in a simple arrangement. With an increase in biodiversity comes population regulation, but the widespread consistent regulation of insect populations is not supported by research results and farmers shouldn't expect that an increase in biodiversity will protect crops from pests. Crop rotations can be considered 'biodiversity in time' and is something nature cannot do. One crop to the next changes the entire biology of the field which makes it difficult to use biocontrol as it may not apply one year to the next.

Mimicking nature isn't a good strategy to protect the soil, maintain soil fertility, use water efficiently or to protect the crop. There is a high cost for yield reductions as a 1% yield loss requires 7 million hectares to replace lost food production. Farming like nature will not work because agriculture is different than nature and making it more like nature will make it less successful as agriculture. However, long term challenges in agriculture, such as soil erosion, leaky nutrient cycles, weed control etc., exist and need to be improved upon. What can agriculture learn from nature? Take what nature provides and improve it or implement it in a completely different way to support the goals of agriculture.

Written by Steph Vanthof, North Eastern Ontario RCC

When it comes to applying manure and other nutrients, **Timing Matters**. OSCIA is participating in this initiative to better manage manure and promote soil health. Follow us on Twitter or join our List Serve for all #TimingMatters updates.

<https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/news/>

Operation Pollinator

OSCIA is pleased to bring Operation Pollinator to Ontario! Operation Pollinator, a partnership between OSCIA, the Soil Conservation Council of Canada and Syngenta, supports producers in their efforts to establish and maintain pollinator habitat on farms. A healthy pollinator population provides many benefits to agriculture as well as the broader ecosystem.

OSCIA is looking for producers across the province who are interested in participating in Operation Pollinator. To enroll in the program, producers agree to convert one-to-two acres of farmland to establish a dedicated Operation Pollinator site. In exchange for dedicating the land, participating producers receive a bag of pollinator-friendly seed to establish the site, and \$100/acre. The seed mix provides a succession of flowering plants that provide a continual source of pollen and nectar for pollinators. Coming from a commercial seed supplier, the mix will be high-quality, clean seed that is free of noxious weed species. All farms are eligible to participate and OSCIA is looking to establish 33 Operation Pollinator sites across the province in 2018.

To learn more about the program or to enroll, please contact Andréa Dubé-Goss, OSCIA Programs Manager at adubegoss@ontariosoilcrop.org or 519.826.6062.

Written by Andréa Dubé-Goss, Programs Manager

Past President Barry Hill, Ag Hall of Fame Inductee

William (Barry) Hill, OSCIA Past President 2011, will be invested at the Agricultural Hall of Fame's annual induction ceremony on June 10th at Country Heritage Park in Milton.

To qualify for this recognition, inductees must have demonstrated visionary leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship in the advancement of agriculture in Ontario. Barry was nominated by OSCIA for his significant contributions to agriculture through leadership on provincial boards as well as new initiatives for agriculture and economic stability within the First Nations Community.



For additional details and to purchase tickets visit the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame's website at www.oahf.on.ca.

Information provided by the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame Association



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Farmers rent 35% of the land they use. Farm & Food Care provides a link to resources that can assist producers at <https://farmlandagreements.ca/>.

Farm & Food Care is also involved in a variety of other areas of focus including: Livestock Emergency Response Training; Timing Matters—addressing the winter spreading of manure; Advocacy Training for Farms; 4-H members; and Speak UP—team training.

Prepared by Neil Moore, East Central RCC



Farm & Food Care Update from the Annual Conference

OSCIA was initially part of AgCare when it formed thirty years ago, and AgCare was amalgamated six years ago into Farm & Food Care.

The goal of Farm & Food Care is to build public trust in food and farming through advocacy, intelligence gathering, issue management, programs, research, and outreach.

Unfortunately, it is often scary or bad news that sells. The farmer image portrayed in the media is old, not modern. 93% of public know little or nothing about food or farming. Consumers often distrust science, making them susceptible to thinking that labels like “non-GMO” are desired. But surveys indicate that 60% would like to know more about farming so there is lots of opportunity to provide education.

A few of the highlights of activities Farm & Food Care has been involved in:

- Offering tours of groups to farm operations, which has been successful, and many producers are comfortable talking about their operation.
- The Real Dirt on Farming started in 2006 and is now in the 4th edition with 3.5 million copies to date.
- The ‘Breakfast on The Farm’ event is popular, and two events are planned this year: June 23, 2018 near Ancaster and September 8, 2018 near Ottawa.
- Virtual Farm Tours are posted on their website. Currently there are 8, with 3 more anticipated to be added this year. These tours are available at <http://www.farmfood360.ca/>.

New Program Opportunities Upcoming



Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP)

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/cap/index.htm>



GREENON Agriculture

<https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/greenon-agriculture/>



BadgerWay

<https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/oscia-programs/sarpal/badgerway>



Congratulations to our 2018 Soil Champion, Daniel Breen from Middlesex County! Look for the feature story on Dan in the February 13 edition of Country Guide.