

OFA : Farmers Proud Of Environment Efforts

By DON McCABE, VICE-PRESIDENT,
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Rarely do farmers take the time to celebrate the accomplishments of their industry. A significant milestone – the 40th anniversary of Earth Day – was marked on April 22, and farmers have every right to tell their fellow citizens about everything they have been doing to protect the earth and improve its environment.

With the joint leadership of the Ontario Farm Animal Council and AGCare, farmers have been encouraged to write about their environmental accomplishments with letters to editors of local newspapers.

There's a lot to talk about in such letters – everything from their conservation tillage efforts to planting trees, production of renewable energy with wind turbines and biodigesters to solar installations to heat barns and power a variety of operations around the farm.

For decades farmers and their families have been employing Environmental Farm Plans (EFP) to ensure their farming operations are friendly to the environment. Through the EFP and its workshops and books, farm families are able to identify areas of their farms that can benefit from improved environmental practices.

When these improvements are made, farmers have been eligible for thousands of dollars to further encourage them to save and protect the environment. Officials estimate farmers added \$32 million of their own funds for projects in 2009.

Ontario farmers were out in front of farmers elsewhere in Canada with their EFP projects. Farmers across Canada witnessed what Ontario farmers were doing to enhance the environment on their farms, and recently started projects in their province.

Advances in technology have been a major influence in improving the environmental care of our farms. These advances make it possible for today's farmer to use satellite imagery to pinpoint the applications of plant nutrients and



herbicides to protect the crops we plant. Using Global Positioning Systems on their farms, we know exactly where weeds are a problem, and where additional nutrients are needed to achieve the optimum yields.

This technology allows today's farmers to optimize the applications of nutrients and crop protection materials, ensuring over-applications don't occur and products are not wasted.

Integrated Pest Management systems have been employed to identify the best and most appropriate ways and means of dealing with pests to minimize pesticide use. These systems have enabled Ontario farmers to cut pesticide usage in half over the past 20 years.

But in using the technologies at hand today, our farmers have also dramatically increased the production from their farms. Factor productivity improvements in agriculture historically outstrip all other areas of our economy.

While feeding Canadians and people around the world our farmers are also providing valuable ecological goods and services. Farmers using no till or low till practices help sequester carbon in the soil, reducing the green house gas effect on our environment.

New feeding regimes for livestock will reduce methane released into the atmosphere. Green energy production on the farm use green house gasses to generate some of Ontario's electricity needs for the future. So as governments move ahead on greenhouse gas policies, they need to know Canadian agriculture may be 10 per cent of the problem, but we can be 20 per cent of the solution.

Ontario farms do much more than grow our healthy and nutritious food. They serve as valuable water recharge areas, provide habitat for thousands of species of wildlife and, through modern farming practices, help preserve our valuable soil resources. How does that compare to an urban city block?

Ontario farmers have much to be proud of as we celebrate Earth Day. And Ontario's consumers have much to be proud of when they ask their retailer for Ontario-grown food. Consumers can be proud of supporting Ontario farmers who continue to improve our environment.

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