

Woodslee farmer recognized for environmental practices

By DANIEL SCHWAB

WOODSLEE – The Essex Soil and Crop Improvement Association named Woodslee farmer John Diemer as the recipient of the 2006 Conservation Farm Award.

Diemer, a graduate of Ridgetown Agricultural College in 1965, was honoured for maintaining a number of environmentally-friendly and conservation practices on his 650-acre farm, which includes a wheat, corn and soybean rotation.

Features of the farm include buffer strips that provide ditch bank protection, no-till cropping and rock chutes. The property also includes a maintained pond and woodlot.

Although Diemer was nominated for the award last year, this season's win still came as a surprise.

"I really don't need the recognition, but at the same time it's nice that ERCA and Soil and Crop do this sort of thing to promote the environment," he said.

The winner of the annual award is chosen by a committee of ESCIA directors. Judging criteria includes overall farm maintenance, tillage practices and crop rotation.

Diemer and his wife Helen were presented with the award during the



Members of the Essex Soil and Crop Improvement Association present Woodslee farmer John Diemer with the group's 2006 Conservation Farm Award last week. From left: Henry Denotter, director on the provincial association's board, ESCIA president Marc Rivest, Michael Dick, ERCA's soil and water conservation technician, Helen and John Diemer.

ESCIA's annual meeting Dec. 7.

ESCIA Election of Directors

Current ESCIA president Marc Rivest was elected to maintain the position for another year.

Felix Weigt-Bienzle and Eric Olson were elected as vice presidents.

Rivest said plans for the next season include the introduction of corn plots as an independent corn adaptability trial. A corn plot is basically run by volunteer co-operators; there are no seed companies involved pushing any one variety or the other, Rivest said.

Also this year, the ESCIA will likely have four-year application trials on soybeans to determine if soybean additives are helpful, Rivest added.

Other decisions to be made include when to spray for leaf beetles and other soil insects.

"Surface insects may come in with the jet stream like the aphids," Rivest warned. "In the future, we're looking a lot right now at soybean rust. It's heavy in the U.S. and could be here in 48 hours. Fortunately, the spore will not survive on our leaves here in the winter because it freezes. But we could have

something new again to face next year."

Attracting new members

Over the next decade, 120,000 farmers in Canada will be reaching retirement age. This may cause a decline in membership to farming associations such as the ESCIA. One of the provincial association's goals is to try to increase its membership by 10 percent.

Henry Denotter, director on the provincial association's board, said this is a problem that is hitting home in Essex County.

"Membership is not a major issue in some areas and in other areas it is," Denotter said.

"In Essex County, unfortunately our membership is dwindling and we need to encourage people to become members – people who are currently farming and even new farmers."

Denotter said the provincial board is currently looking to other organizations such as 4-H Clubs in an attempt to recruit new, younger members.

"The potential for members is out there," Denotter said. "But there are still a lot of people who don't want to get involved, so that's why we encourage members to bring their buddies and neighbours – members have to increase members."

Province expands loan program to municipalities

(London, Ont./CNW) – The McGuinty government is enhancing Infrastructure Ontario's highly successful OSIFA Loan Program to provide financing for all capital expenditures by municipalities and universities, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing John Gerretsen announced Dec. 8.

"The loan program is one of many tools the province is using to tackle the infrastructure deficit and get more infrastructure built sooner," said Gerretsen. "Our government has listened to and acted on requests from Ontario's municipalities and universities to enhance Infrastructure Ontario's loan program."

The expanded program will further stimulate infrastructure investments to improve local police and fire stations and equipment, as well as ferries, docks and airports. With these changes to the program, local hydro utilities, transit corporations, universities' federated and affiliated colleges, and not-for-profit long-term care service providers are also eligible to apply for affordable loans for key infrastructure projects.

"The Infrastructure Ontario loan program has been a valuable financing tool for municipalities," said Doug Reycraft, President of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. "Expanding the eligibility of qualifying projects will provide flexibility in building key infrastructure projects for our local communities."

To date, Infrastructure Ontario has committed to providing more than \$2.8 billion in affordable loans to municipalities and universities. The investments have stimulated more than 1,200 infrastructure projects to support priorities such as clean water, sewage, waste management, road and bridge improvements, teaching and learning facilities, as well as recreational and sports facilities.

This funding initiative builds on ReNew Ontario, the government's five-year, \$30 billion plus investment plan to renew and modernize public infrastructure.

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