

SOIL CONSERVATION AWARDS RECOGNIZE LITTLE POND AND LOWER FREETOWN FARMERS

MARCH 8th, 2018

PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association recognized two farmers for their soil conservation and general sustainable agriculture efforts at a recent event held in Summerside, March 8th, 2018.

“This is our 30th annual presentation of Soil Conservationist of the Year Award; the Board of Directors have seen a tremendously positive evolution in attitudes and actions over the years in how our producers in this province are protecting the land and water resources. Kudos to our farmers as we are really second to none in sustainable agriculture”, says John Hooper, President of PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

Pondsedge Farms Inc of Little Pond was the recipient of the *Soil Conservationist of the Year Award* in the Livestock Category; and Barnyard Organics of Lower Freetown was the recipient of the *Soil Conservationist of the Year Award* in the Cash Crop Category.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Mr John Jamieson; and AAFC Associate Director RDT, Mr Mark Grimmet, were on hand at the awards to assist in the presentation on March 8th, 2018.

Pondsedge Farms Inc, Kent, Michael, and Robbie MacDonald, is a dairy operation in Little Pond, Prince Edward Island. The brothers have been farmers for 38 years and in recent years have focused only on dairy. Milking 380 dairy cows certainly takes a lot of well managed forage and field crops to keep them all fed and happy. They manage 1,400 acres of barley grain, soybean, alfalfa, clover, grass, silage corn and grain corn.

Just in the past 12-months, they have begun using their new dairy housing and milking parlour facilities, and have had open houses and drop in visitors giving them an opportunity to share in the features they are using and how they manage their manure.

They maintain their land on a six year or longer crop rotation consisting of corn; soybean or barley; and 3 to 4 year alfalfa and grass mix, or, double cut red clover and grass mix.

Kent, Michael, and Robbie have considerable soil conservation enhancement measures and earthen structures in place to control water flow and reduce soil erosion on many of their farms including:

1. 6,160 feet of diversion terraces,
2. 4,400 feet of grass waterways,
3. 1,240 feet of farmable berms,
4. 3.0 acres in extended buffer zones, and
5. 80 acres strip cropped.



Picture left to right are John Hooper, President PEIS CIA; Michael MacDonald, Pondsedge Farms Inc; Kent MacDonald, Pondsedge Farms Inc; Mr John Jamieson, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries; Mr Mark Grimmet, AAFC Associate Director RDT.

On two sensitive areas they leave grassed filter strips on the bottom of slopes. All of the dairy heifers and dry cows that are on pasture have no access to watercourses or wetlands with 2,200 feet of fencing on one pasture - the other pasture does not have a stream or wetland.

With consultants retained from Ducks Unlimited Canada, the MacDonalds constructed a wetland duck pond at the location of the dairy operation in Little Pond. They have also reforested a recently harvested area. A double wall fuel storage on a concrete pad with a protection barrier was installed.

In the middle of May, when most of the manure is applied for their corn and barley crops, the fields will see incorporation of the manure within hours of the application, reducing odours and loss of valuable nutrients. Manure is also applied to their forage fields in the fall of the last year of production in the crop rotation.

Pondsedge has Paradigm Precision provide soil and manure sampling and analysis services for their agronomy decisions. They calibrate their sprayer once a year and have On-Target Sprayer Services provide additional support.

Both the dairy barn and replacement cattle barn have concrete storage of manure, or are on a straw bed. The milking cows are housed in a free stall barn with the manure and milk house wash water stored in a concrete pit with 8 month capacity.

Pondsedge Farms has an Environmental Farm Plan for their operation. Kent has been a Dairy Farmers of PEI Director for 12 years, and Michael has been an ADL director for 6.

They were also active members of the Souris Soil and Crop Improvement Association, and they are participants in the ALUS Program.

“As a successful agri-business, Kent, Michael and Robbie MacDonald of Pondsedge Farms Inc incorporates a strong work ethic with a strategic vision to the promising future of agriculture on Prince Edward Island” says John Hooper, President of PEISCI.

Barnyard Organics of Lower Freetown, Prince Edward Island is a family farm operated by Mark and Sally Bernard, and their 4 children, Lucy, Wilson, Thayne and Solomon. Twelve years ago, Mark and Sally took over Mark’s dad’s conventional potato farm and have since converted the land to organic production.

Their farming operation consists of producing 300 acres of organic cereals, 100 acres of organic soybeans, and 100 acres of forages. They own most of the certified organic land they farm with renting only 7 acres.



Picture left to right are John Hooper, President PEISCI; Sally Bernard, Barnyard Organics; Mark Bernard, Barnyard Organics; Mr John Jamieson, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries; Mr Mark Grimmet, AAFC Associate Director RDT

The Bernard’s crop rotation is 5-years: Clover; wheat; barley and field peas mix; soybeans; and oats under seeded to clover.

Although they have received in Soil Conservationist of the Year Award in the Cash Crop Category, the Bernards’ also raise broiler chickens and laying hens. Both types of poultry are raised mainly on a pasture with shelters moved daily during the summer months with some free range for their laying hens. Mark and Sally really like the pasture

system for their poultry as it eliminates the job of spreading manure on the fields -as the birds do that for them. The poultry manure of course feeds the soil and invigorates the grass.

Barnyard Organics has a supply of dairy bed pack manure they compost with mussel shell waste and applied it to 100 acres annually. In their green manure system, Sally and Mark believe highly in clover as a vital part of their fertility and soil tilth improvements.

Eighty to 85% of the straw is left on fields to go back into the soil. For the hay fields, only every second rotation will one cut of silage be removed from the field - the other years it is mulched and left to build the soil even more.

Sally and Mark also uses winter cereals in their rotation to break weed cycles, provide green cover for the winter, and provide soil and organic building benefits. All of their land base has green cover going into winter, except for the soybean stubble - these fields are not fall tilled however to maintain the stubble residue.

Tillage passes are as minimum as possible. Moldboard plowing is generally only once in 5-years.. They use a "false or stale" seed bed method where, after the secondary tillage, they leave the ground a number of days before planting to flush out and then finger-weed-out that first growth of weeds. The finger-weeder is the Bernard's main weed control method - they also have a specialized row cultivator for their 18-inch row soybeans.

Sally and Mark have extensive soil conservation structures and features on many fields. They have 7 fields or 250 acres that have features consisting of:

- (20) grass waterways, or 13,300 feet,
- (2) diversion terraces, or 5,200 feet
- (2) farmable berm terraces, or 530 feet

New above-ground double walled pressurized fuel tanks were installed and they also participate in the ALUS program.

All buffer zones on the farm are wider than the mandatory 15-meters to ensure there is no tillage creep into the zone. They also implement an 8-meter buffer between their farm and adjacent ones.

The local watershed group has planted native trees and shrubs in several buffer zones to enhance and strengthen bio-diversity.

The Bernards' planted over 3,000 trees in hedgerows for wildlife corridors and wind control. In addition, they have worked with Bedeque Bay Environmental Management Association, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada on providing habitat and protecting the barn yard swallow and bobolink bird species by leaving barn doors open, building nesting sites, and delaying mowing of pastures. Bat boxes have also been installed on the farm.

Mark and Sally are members of the Atlantic Canadian Organic Network (ACORN), Canadian Organic Growers (COG), PEI Certified Organic Producers Cooperative, and NFU. Mark has served on the PEI Environmental Advisory Committee and as President of PEI Certified Organic Producers. Sally has been Secretary and President of ACORN and sat on the Organic Value Chain Round Table.

For the Bernards', their priority is soil health. In fact they have a blog named "For the Love of the Soil". Mark and Sally believe that while the profit is above ground, the wealth is underneath.

"As a very successful family farm, Barnyard Organics Inc is dedicated to growing economic opportunities in rural PEI, in a sustainable fashion", says John Hooper, President PEISCA.