

## **Gaining Ground One Farm at a Time**

Joan Parker PAg, NorthShore Agri-Conservation Club, NBSCIA

The New Brunswick Soil and Crop Improvement Association (NBSCIA) oversee seven of the eight Agri-environmental Clubs in the province. Each club has a full time coordinator and roughly 20 to 30 farm members. The clubs receive funding from the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture and Aquaculture (NBDAA) with farmers also paying an annual membership fee.

The first step for a new Club member is to have the club coordinator assist with the completion of the Environmental Farm Plan. During this process, areas for improvement are discussed and noted for future action. If a member wants to import new technology on a land management strategy the coordinator can draw upon NBDAA personnel and outside expertise to help make it happen or a coordinator may be aware of ideas for consideration.

Addressing an individual farm's needs can be as simple as suggesting changes in tillage practices. Once a member has adopted changes the farm becomes an example for fellow members to emulate. For example a demonstration was held at the farm of John Schenkels last year to show his liquid manure tanker injecting manure directly into sod. This method conserves nutrients from the manure for use by the crop.

Many club members now have initiated Nutrient Management Plans. These NMPs not only help producers optimize the use of nutrient resources from the farm (such as manure), they also provide information on pH adjustment and phosphorous indexes. Nutrient applications are better matched to crop production needs and excessive nutrient purchases are reduced saving members money. The coordinators can also GPS the farm fields to measure field acreages and import the boundaries onto digital maps overlaid with contours and streams indicated.

When several club members have a common need, workshops can be organized. Recently, the importance of cover crops and soil health were addressed. Heather Darby from the University of Vermont and Steve Groff, a producer from Pennsylvania, were brought in through a collaborative effort between clubs and NBDAA. Arrangements have also been made for a speaker on surface and subsurface drainage to visit multiple club regions.

The club coordinators have had recent training in planning field shelterbelts organised by the Eastern Canada Soil and Water Conservation Centre under an agroforestry project initiative. They attend conferences and workshops and work on adaptive research projects. Club members across New Brunswick participated in the testing of the HOLOS Greenhouse Gas Calculator as part of a national project initiative led by the Soil Conservation Council of Canada. Each participant had the opportunity to see how their operation could reduce their GHG production by implementing certain practices on farm.

“If you see someone who has done something well, you can then consider whether it will work for your operation. The assistance of the club coordinator has helped us a lot with the implementing of the EFP and NMP. All in all, it is fun to be part of such an environmentally

beneficial club.” said Maarten van Oord, president of the Central Agri-Environmental Club and NBSCIA.

“Both the club and our Coordinator help keep our Farm up to par in areas like Nutrient Management, and Crop Planning. Also appreciated is the help we receive GPS'ing fields and guidance regarding access to government assistance programs.” said Stephan Hewitt, member of the NorthShore Agri-Conservation Club.

“Being a club member has allowed me, through our coordinator, to stay on top of various issues concerning soils, no-till pasture improvements, BMPs, Environmental Farm Plan, and Nutrient Management Plan. It is an excellent source of information in a very busy world.” said Fraser McCallum, member of the NorthShore Agri-Conservation Club and 2009 NBSCIA Farm of the Year.



Miramichi Soil and Crop field day touring Fraser McCallum's rotationally grazed pastures.