



Protecting Ontario's Fresh Water Supply

BY COURTNEY DENARD

Ontario is trying to curb the amount of nutrients going into major waterways. This is not necessarily a new issue but it's going to become a bigger issue as time goes on.

ONTARIO RELIES ON ITS LAKES FOR A VARIETY OF USES

including leisure, drinking water, and in the case of agriculture, for food production. Because of this, farmers are being called upon to protect the province's freshwater supply and ensure they're doing all they can to reduce risks to water quality.

The Holland Marsh Growers' Association (HMGA) has recognized this calling and has chosen to be proactive with the development and implementation of the HMGA Water Project. To get a clearer idea of what this important project entails, the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Convention recently spoke with Bridget Visser, a project team member. Below is a selection of the interview.

Why was the HMGA Water Project developed?

A few years back, a goal was established to reduce phosphorus in Lake Simcoe and funding was dedicated to this cause. The Lake Simcoe South-eastern Georgian Bay Cleanup Fund eventually came into action and people were able to submit applications to receive funding for the purpose of reducing phosphorus content in Lake Simcoe and the Nottawasaga Valley Watershed. The HMGA proposed a project that would aim to reduce phosphorus content from vegetable wash-up with a specific focus on root vegetables, potatoes, and greens.

Can you tell me about the project's methodology?

The project is a 4-year initiative and its completion date is the end of March 2017 so we're about half way at this point. I believe we have approximately 20 different test sites, all working farms and washing facilities. We spent the winter of 2014–15 looking at solid phosphorus removal technology (e.g. filters) and this winter we've been looking at technologies that are targeting nutrient removal. The next step will be finishing the data work and putting the results into a manual that will be available in print and online. Our plan is to be able to offer 2-3 technologies for growers across the province to reference.

Who is involved in the HMGA Water Project?

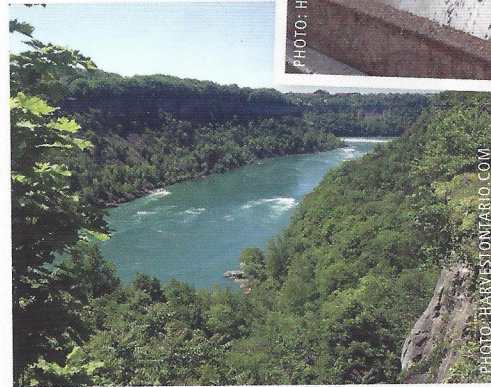
The Lake Simcoe South-eastern Georgian Bay Cleanup Fund is financing the project and HMGA is the over-seeing body. The association is working with Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. Support is also coming from Flowers Canada, the Ontario Potato Board, and Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association. On top of that, HMGA has partnered with various technology companies that are supplying equipment. Our biggest cooperators, however, are the farmers who are involved. Without them we wouldn't be able to test any of the new technology or management practices that we're developing.

How will the project's results impact Ontario growers?

Ontario is trying to curb the amount of nutrients going into major waterways. This is not necessarily a new issue but it's going to become a bigger issue as time goes on. Growers are going to have to treat any water or discharges leaving their land before it enters a waterway so more and more farms are going to have to think about this. As the government and conservation authorities start to tighten levels in the lakes they will turn to the people producing the discharges. In fact, it's already happening. With that in mind, we concluded that when it comes to people, you can always tell them how to do something but showing them is usually better. That's why we partnered with technology providers and set up on-farm to show growers the different options out there. Our objective with this research is to keep farmers ahead of the regulations to ensure their businesses continue into the future.

Is there anything else you would like Ontario growers to know about phosphorus reduction?

It's not a cheap thing to deal with. There are definitely costs involved but in the long run the benefits will be there. The biggest thing for a lot of growers is that they see it as another task for them to do but we're trying to get them ahead of the curve. These regulations are coming and we want growers to think about it before they have to be thinking about it. That's a better way to do it than having a regulation come in and forcing change. It's going to cost, take time, and create more work but at the end of the day it will be beneficial. ■



HYDROSIEVE IN ACTION TREATING RUN-OFF



PRE-TREATMENT (LEFT), WATER TREATED WITH COAGULANTS AND FLOCCULANTS (MIDDLE) AND POST-GEOTUBE® (RIGHT) WITH TOP AND BOTTOM PICTURES TAKEN APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE WITH THE ADDITION AND MIXING OF COAGULANTS AND FLOCCULANTS.

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