



ONFARM goes high-tech for first Tailgate Tour October 14, 2020

On October 14, the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) hosted its first ONFARM Tailgate Tour. The event introduced farmers to the On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM) program and demonstrated best management practices (BMPs) and how they can improve soil health. Farmers, project partners, government and conservation authority staff, and members of ONFARM's Technical Working Group and Stakeholder Engagement Working Group were in attendance. The event was held outdoors to allow for physical distancing.

ONFARM cooperator Brett Israel of 3Gen Organics in Wellington County hosted the tour. 3Gen Organics is a multi-generational farrow to finish swine operation with 1000 acres of cropland managed under the Canada Organic Regime. Israel is no stranger to experimenting with new methods to improve soil health and welcomed the opportunity to share his experience with others. Israel explained that one of the strengths of the ONFARM program is farmer-to-farmer learning.

"ONFARM has been a fantastic opportunity for our family farm business. Being able to work with leading soil health researchers to discover how our management impacts our most precious resource is beyond valuable," said Israel. "When we come together for discussions like this, it strengthens the bond of the agricultural community in our shared goal of improving soil health. Through learning from one another, we can make a positive impact on soil health."

The Soil Resource Group (SRG), which plays an instrumental role in investigating soil health data at field sites, lead field demonstrations and provided background information on BMP and site selection and soil health measurements. Don King, Principal Research Agronomist with SRG, emphasized the importance of working closely with the ONFARM cooperators to evaluate BMPs that address the needs of their operations. Israel's ONFARM site compares two different interseeded cover crop mixes on very gently sloping clay loam soil. Questions from attendees sparked interesting discussion about the functional benefits of the interseeded cover crops for organic management and difficult harvest conditions.



Field demonstrations were enhanced by the addition of OSCIA's new Mobile Soil Technology Suite (MSTS). The mobile demonstration suite consists of a trailer equipped with a LED screen, sound system, live-feed camera and more. Soil profiles, for example, were projected onto the large LED screen for attendees to view clearly at a safe distance.

ONFARM Cooperator Brett Israel of 3Gen Organics shares motivations for on-farm research and soil health BMPs.



Soil Resource Group conducts field demonstration that is projected onto a large LED screen using live-feed camera.



Attendees experience soil health demonstrations on large LED screen as part of the Mobile Soil Technology Suite.

“It’s so gratifying to see folks come together over a shared interest in innovative practices,” Angela Straathof, OSCIA Program Director observed. “ONFARM is all about connecting farmers and addressing their soil health questions. Seeing the MSTs in action and hearing first-hand Brett’s enthusiasm for what they’re trying on this plot is supporting that objective so well.”

Through these events, OSCIA is excited to reach a wider audience of farmers, crop advisors, academics and industry to advance collaboration and implementation of BMPs suitable for improving soil health. To support that goal, ONFARM will establish a network of long-term applied research demonstration sites to serve as outreach and education venues for Ontario's agricultural industry. Four sites will be selected from ONFARM's 25 collaborator farms across Southern Ontario, covering a broad range of geographies, commodities, soil types, farming practices and field conditions. The program's long-term and geographically differentiated nature make it uniquely positioned to evaluate the environmental, economic and agronomic effectiveness of BMPs on soil health.

For regular updates on the program, including future events, visit the ONFARM website at <https://www.osciaresearch.org/onfarm-applied-research/> and follow @OntarioSoilCrop on Twitter.

The ONFARM program is a four-year, applied research initiative delivered by OSCIA on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to support soil health and water quality research across farms in Ontario. This program is funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

For more information about ONFARM, please contact ONFARM@ontariosoilcrop.org.