

# Welcome To the Region of Georgian Central Soil and Crop Improvement Association

The Georgian Central Region is made up of the counties of Bruce, Dufferin, Grey, North Simcoe and South Simcoe. This is a very large geographical area (14,960 km<sup>2</sup>, population 634,400), that is bordered by Lake Huron and Georgian Bay on the west and north. Lake Huron is the second largest of the Great Lakes, has the longest shoreline of the Great Lakes, and is the third largest fresh water lake on earth. Georgian Bay is almost as large as Lake Ontario, and is often referred to as the 6<sup>th</sup> Great Lake. Marvel at our geological wonders - the Niagara Escarpment is a prominent landform in our area. Dufferin County is a high plateau, and as such forms the watershed between the four lakes: Huron, Erie, Ontario and Simcoe.

If you are coming from the north you enter our region at Port Severn or Washago. If you are coming from the east you will be here as soon as you go north of Gamebridge or Brechin on Highway #12 – yes that is east of Lake Simcoe (4<sup>th</sup> largest lake in the province)! The Highways of #9, #89, #87 and # 86 provide the southern border except for the township of East Garafraxa in Dufferin. Grey and Dufferin Counties share south and west borders consecutively with Wellington County. Dufferin’s Southern neighbor is Peel County. Simcoe and Dufferin both abut York Region. Simcoe’s eastern neighbor is the District of Muskoka. The County of Huron lies to the south of Bruce County.

As you enter our area, you will discover a land of charm, culture and diverse natural beauty. Our region offers: glorious inland lakes; the best beaches in Ontario; rocky islands and limestone cliffs; stunning scenery; dramatic waterfalls; an intricate web of cold and warm water streams; dense woodlands; lush valleys; and rolling cattle pastures and meadows. Fishing opportunities abound throughout the counties. Our bountiful mineral resources include decorative stone, marble, unconsolidated aggregate and dolomite deposits. Our region is a playground for all seasons, offering a wide variety of recreational activities, and attracting and supporting a huge tourism industry. We offer professional golf courses, ski hills (720 vertical feet at Blue Mountain), cross country trails, snowmobile trails, winery tours, art galleries, theatres, beaches, and much more. We are “cottage country” to many summer vacationers. There are a number of *must see* tourism areas in our region. We asked our members what tourism destinations they wanted to highlight, and these are their replies:

- Bruce County:** The Bruce Trail (Canada’s oldest and longest footpath), the Grotto at Tobermory, Sauble Beach, Canoeing the Saugeen River, Provincial and National Parks, Bruce County Museum in Southampton, Bruce Power (Nuclear Generating Station)
- Dufferin County:** Dufferin County Museum, Luther Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Mono Cliffs Provincial Park
- Grey County:** Seven spectacular waterfalls, rock climbing, Scenic Caves Nature Adventures (Ontario’s longest suspension footbridge, caving and zip lines), Grey Roots Museum, Ridge Runner Mountain Coaster
- Simcoe County:** Georgian Bay; Elmvale Jungle Zoo; Simcoe County Museum with historic industrial machinery display; Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre; Saint Marie Among the Hurons; Wasaga Beach - the longest fresh water beach in the world; South Simcoe Railway’s Historic Steam Train; “1 hour to the south gets you to the largest airport in Canada, yet 1 hour to the north you can be canoeing in the wilderness”; “This is God’s country....just don’t tell anyone!”

As evidenced by our fertile and productive farmland, it is not all about *play* in Georgian Central. Agriculture is an industry in our region, but it is also a way of life. According to 2006 statistics, there are 8241 farms in our region. This is 14.4% of the total number of farms in the province. Our 4 counties have a very strong livestock base. 21.6% of the population of cattle in Ontario, and 30% of the sheep are fed in this area. Not surprisingly, we have 20% of the hay acreage of Ontario and 14% of the silage corn. Barley and mixed grain are 38.4% and 34.3% of the provincial production. And yes, we do grow them for the grain and the straw.

Cash crop acres continue to expand within our area with the largest acres of these in Bruce and Simcoe counties. Canola is well suited to the area with 32.5% of the provincial acres grown here. Soybean acres continue to increase with 8.75% of the provincial acres grown here. 5.9% of the provincial corn acres and 11% of the provincial winter wheat acres are grown here.

Apple production is favoured in Beaver Valley. Of the 700 apple growers in Ontario, 60 of them are in the Georgian Bay Area. Meaford, in Grey County, is the apple capital of Ontario. 21.3% of the provincial apple acres are in Grey County and 24% are in the region. Potatoes are Ontario's largest fresh vegetable crop and are second only to tomatoes as a processing crop. 51.8% of the provincial acres are grown in the Georgian Central Region. Simcoe and Dufferin Counties produce more potatoes than any other counties in Ontario. The Dufferin County website states that they "grow enough potatoes each year to more than fill Skydome." In 2008, Simcoe County harvested 12,940 acres of potatoes, and Dufferin County harvested 5,310 acres.

Honey, maple syrup, fruits and vegetables, organic produce and various other home grown/made products find their way to farmers' markets and farm gate roadside stands where you can literally taste the freshness that rural life brings! "Eat local" initiatives are strong forces in our counties, including Simcoe Farm Fresh, Savour Muskoka, and Food Link Grey Bruce. We are also home to vineyards producing local, award-winning wines, and there are many breweries in our region. Floriculture, nursery and sod farms are prevalent in our region, especially in Simcoe County, where in 2008, this category brought in the highest level of farm income of any other farming commodity. Christmas tree production is another vital crop in many of our counties. Our producers are also actively pursuing green energy opportunities. They are farming the sun, wind and evaluating biomass crops.

Our region is home to some magnificent forests, including hardwood and conifer stands. The maple stands in our region, particularly in Grey and Bruce Counties, are noted for having finer quality hard maple, producing excellent quality veneer logs. Approximately 37% of the land base in Bruce County, or a total of 370,453 acres is forested. Simcoe County is broadly described as the Simcoe uplands, and Simcoe lowlands. The uplands, which include the well-forested areas of the Georgian Bay fringe and the Oro Moraine, consist of 51% forest cover; the lowlands are approximately 27% forested. Simcoe County has 412,505 acres of forested land. These forests provide a valuable economic benefit to our producers, as well as positively impacting the environment, and providing protection of wildlife habitat and water resources. Each County has a forestry program. Bruce County manages 11,985 acres of forests; the County of Grey owns 8,340 acres of forest; the Dufferin County Forest is a 2,500 acre forest, and Simcoe County Forests 31,290 acres. The Simcoe County Forests are the oldest and largest municipally owned forests in all of Ontario. Primarily managed for forestry purposes, the County Forests also provide substantial environmental, and social and economic benefits.

Our counties are linked by the commonalities of: our landscape and terrain; the importance of water (whether it be shoreline or headwaters); the importance of tourism, and our strong agricultural bases. There may be differences in the prevalence of individual agricultural commodities in our counties, but our producers are similar to those all across this province. They are excellent stewards of the land who are committed to the production of food for the people of Ontario and beyond. Our differences expand our knowledge base, and our commonalities are what bind us together to work as a region – the Georgian Soil and Crop Improvement Association. Come and explore where we call home, and experience who we are.