

## ECOLOGICAL DAY TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS

### ***Bryan Gilvesy, *Birds, Bees and Our Working Landscape...Harvesting all the Value Your Farm Produces:****

Birds, Bees and our working landscape...harvesting all the value your farm produces: A discussion of the experiences of the farmer led Norfolk County Alternative Land Use Services program. A threshold has been passed where whatever has been done environmentally as a society to counteract the problems created by growth and a heavy ecological footprint has not been enough. The time has come to recognize that the farmers and ranchers of Canada must be considered key environmental solution providers. This must involve engagement of the farm community and a recognition of the skills farmers can bring to conservation. By merging the interests of the farmers with environmental interests, we can create ecological solutions beneficial to all the people of Ontario.

### ***Christie Young, *Opportunities and Challenges Facing a New Generation of Ecological Farmers:****

Our farming communities are aging. Structural, economic and practical challenges are preventing new and young farmers from entering our farm sector. With 75% of current farmers looking to sell or transfer their farms in the next ten years - and 60% of these without a named successor - agriculture faces difficult succession issues. This loss of farmers will severely impact our food security, our rural communities and the stewardship of our valuable, productive farmlands.

At FarmStart, we have begun to witness a strong resurgence of interest in healthy food and farming. We work with passionate and committed new farmers from all backgrounds who are set on getting into the sector; increasing numbers of young people from farm and non-farm backgrounds, new immigrants and second-career farmers are interested in pursuing a future and livelihood in agriculture. They are striving to build entrepreneurial, economically viable and ecologically sustainable farm enterprises.

There are many challenges facing these new entrants, yet there are also new opportunities. They bring skills, connections and passion that can lead to innovation and renewal. The farmers we work with are learning from their elders and creating new ways of doing business, integrating old ways and new technologies to effectively manage their crops, animals and farms, connect with customers, and create meaning and value for their products.

The growth of consumer demand for organically produced, artisanal and locally-grown foods has created a space for new entrants and smaller-scale farm businesses who can seize this opportunity by reconnecting with consumers, shortening the supply chain and selling more directly. Municipal and provincial governments are beginning to realize the potential, both in terms of food security and economic development, of supporting these new farmers who are starting new farm businesses and re-orienting their farms to respond to the new consumer trends and the changes in our economies, resources and climate.

**Dr. Robert Nurse, *Weed Management in Organic Crop Production Systems:***

Obtaining effective weed control in organic cropping systems is challenging. Without herbicides growers must rely on an integrated approach for weed management that may include crop rotation, cover crops, living mulches, tillage, biodegradable beds, and biological controls. Unfortunately, even after implementing some or all of these measures, weed escapes may need to be controlled by hand-pulling. This talk will summarize how to maximise the benefits of the available integrated weed management options and will present results of recent research such as cover crop crimping and using compost as a physical barrier to weed seed germination. Additionally, the importance of proper weed identification and tailoring your weed management based on the spectrum of weeds present in your field will be discussed.

**Freeman Boyd, *Sustaining the Local Food Movement:***

While the Local Food Movement does not endorse ecological agriculture principles per se, it does envision a diverse food system made up of many small players - farms, processors, distributors and retailers. Such a restructuring of the food system would reverse a 50 year trend of concentration - fewer but bigger players - and do much to enable more ecological forms of farming. This presentation will look at some of the threats to this restructuring agenda - including the potential to be co-opted by the big players that already control much of the flow of food in Ontario. It closes by asking how our community must mobilize to assure that its interests in reforming the food system are realized.

**Anne Verhallen, *Pushing the Envelope with Cover Crops:***

Good soil health is critical for sustainable production. Cover crops offer a number of practical ways of maintaining and improving soil health. Explore the many ways of making cover crops fit into production systems – whether you are a livestock producer or a vegetable grower.

**Producer Panel: *Pasture Grazing*, Bill J. van Nes, St. Brigid's Dairy Ltd; Chris Boettcher; David Weber, *Webers Pastured Meats:***

This panel of producers, who have been recognized by their peers as being outstanding graziers will share their management tips. They will discuss: Recommendations based on what have worked for them; Watering systems; Fencing Systems, Wintering practices; fertilizers; recommendations for change-overs from pastures to crops and vice versa – break up rotations, special grass mixes used, and much more.