GEORGIAN CENTRAL SOIL & CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

GEORGIAN BULLETIN

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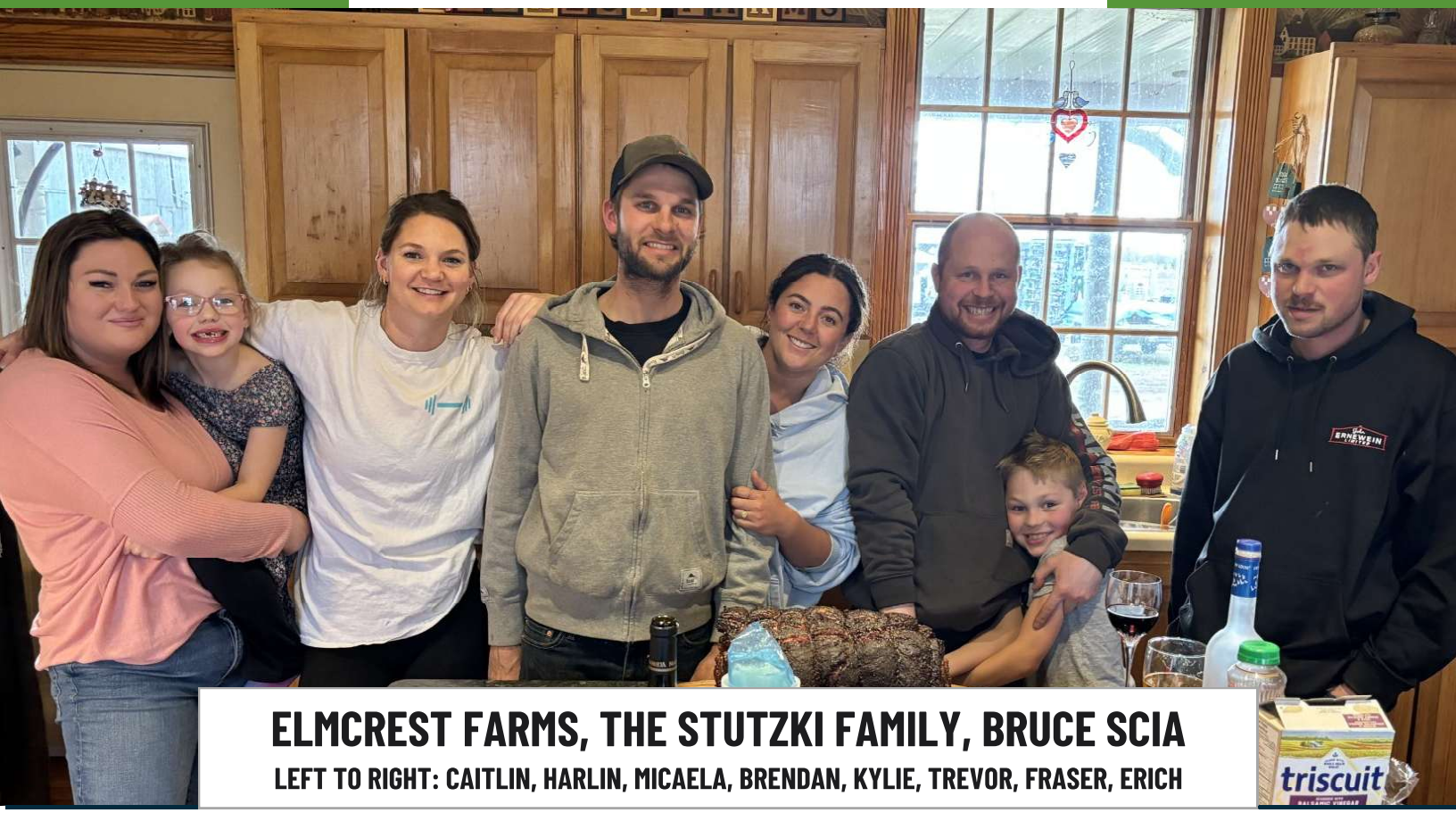

ELMCREST FARMS, THE STUTZKI FAMILY, BRUCE SCIA

LEFT TO RIGHT: CAITLIN, HARLIN, MICAELA, BRENDAN, KYLIE, TREVOR, FRASER, ERICH

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

WRITTEN BY EMILY MCKAGUE

ELMCREST FARMS, THE STUTZKI FAMILY

Vince and Heather Stutzki.

Vince and Heather Stutzki, along with their four children; Trevor, Erich, Brendan and Micaela operate a sheep and cash crop farm just outside of Chesley, ON.

Vince and Heather purchased the original 200 acres in 1988 and have expanded since then as their children became more involved in the business and purchased farms of their own.

Today the Stutzki family keeps 800 or more ewes and works 500 acres together.

A few of the common themes that came across during our interview included the family's focus on research and data, fitting new technologies or practices into their current operation, and having a forward-thinking, continuously learning mindset which allows them to put the previous into practice.

Vince said that although their four kids have busy careers off the farm, they are all heavily involved. Trevor is a machinist/management with an aero-technology company which builds parts for airplanes. He also does all of the planning and management for the family cropping operation, and is a Secan seed grower, hoping to get into producing propagation seed in time.

Erich works for New Life Mills and he and his family are also involved on the cropping side, owning a farm along with Trevor, not too far from the home place.

Brendan owns an excavation business in Thornbury, and Micaela is a full time firefighter with the Owen Sound fire department. She also owns a farm with Trevor, across the road from Erich and his family.

Everyone is available during planting and harvesting seasons. Whether it is to run the cultivator or get haylage and silage off the fields or even run meals out everyone is involved. The new shop is a great place to find everyone in the winter months repairing and updating equipment.

Vince commented that they've started the farm transition process with research so far, and that he believes it will move along in earnest in the next five years. He noted that they can't fix a hard and fast timeline to transition planning, as the process needs to work for everyone involved, encompassing changes in their lives and adapting as paths alter. Vince mentioned that they have a mentor who is in his eighties and is still in the process of transitioning – it is ongoing work, and he feels that is the way it should be. Vince also said that he can't imagine just stopping the farm work and moving to town. He looks forward to staying involved and working with his family for many years, noting it is a privilege to work together.

The sheep enterprise is mainly run by Heather, although Vince said that it really is the calendar that dictates the jobs that happen there. They have groups lambing 5 times a year, with each ewe lambing three times in a two year period. Their lambs are fed to a heavy weight on farm and marketed every two weeks. The intense production system means that everything needs to be timed accurately – he said that lamb groups are weaned at exactly two months, because the next group will be knocking at the barn door needing in, and Heather has extensive spreadsheets tracking all aspects of the operation.

On the crops-side of things, the Stutzkis grow a rotation including corn, soybeans, winter barley, oats and hay. They have applied the same principle of producing three crops in two years from the sheep operation to their cropping strategy. Vince said they plan for 30% of their ground to grow three crops every two years. This is achieved by planting short day corn or soybeans, winter barley and then oats. In years when they are adding forage to the rotation, hay might be underseeded with oats after corn comes off. A lot of the crops that they grow are tied to feed needs for the flock. Corn is harvested for silage and for grain, which is dried on farm and can be used for feed, and sometimes the stover is baled as well. They get similar use out of their winter barley and oats crops and are even experimenting with a Sevita variety of soybeans called Plenish which can be fed on farm without needing roasting first. Vince pointed out that the inefficiency of feeding soymeal is mind boggling when you think about beans being grown on farm, dried, shipped to Hamilton, turned into soymeal, shipped back to a feed mill, then to the farm to be fed where they came from in the first place.

Incorporating livestock and crops on the same operation gives the Stutzkis some flexibility when it comes to harvest timing or uses. Vince noted that if the oat crop is going to be too late to harvest, they can cut and store it as silage. He also mentioned that they have some topography which is just too rolling to work the fields effectively, so they have 36 acres that were put into permanent pasture which house their replacement ewe lambs each summer. They used to graze cover crops but found that at a stocking density of 200 animals per acre, everything turned to mud with a rain. Having the ability to cut and store feeds in one go lets them harvest the crop without being caught by a weather event part way through.

Left: On-farm heavy equipment repairs

Above: Equipment upgrades on-farm

Managing their manure has been an important piece of the crops and livestock puzzle. They've found that hauling manure to fields at the time it needs to be spread cost them in both time and storage space. With tight cropping

Right: Inside view of the new sheep barn.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

intervals, the pressure of staying ahead of weather, and having limited time for field work between day jobs; Vince said that it was hard to get manure on the fields and incorporated without holding up planting. Instead, they started stockpiling manure on fields when they have the time to move it. With good records, they earmark the number of loads that will need to be applied to each field and keep a record of how many are delivered. When the time comes for spreading, manure is already on site and ready to use and storage space is kept freed-up in the barnyard.

When asked about the best thing they've done on the farm, Vince didn't hesitate to say that moving to a no-till management system was it. He shared that this was something that Trevor and Erich were interested in years ago, but the cost of investing in the equipment held the family back. That changed when the boys purchased their farms thirteen year ago, and the family needed larger equipment to handle the additional acres. They did research to back the decision and took the leap. Vince talked about decision making being a process that includes a lot of research, many discussions with everyone affected, and then the act of looking back five or so years later and assessing whether the change has been a good one. He said that conventional tillage was a system that worked for them, until they could look back and see how many benefits have come from switching to no-till. At this point, he said the opportunities that no-till provides them are "mind-bending". He feels that they wouldn't be able to push the double cropping that they do with a conventional tillage system, because of the additional time needed for seed bed preparation. By the time they had the ground prepared, their second crop would be late going in and their success rate would decrease considerably. He also noted the decrease in fuel needed for no-till as a big benefit.

Time management is a very important part of farming, something that Vince thinks is even more critical now than in the past. He noted that the number of times they are in a field has increased, with the opportunity for split applications of nitrogen and applications of sulfur or micro-nutrients. He mentioned that planning the cropping enterprise requires a huge amount of management on Trevor's part. With all the crops they are growing simultaneously, they might have a combine, sprayer, and seed drill all in the fields at the same time. Vince talked excitedly about opportunities for agriculture and where technology or A.I. solutions could fit into a farm. He said that he and Heather try to attend every meeting and educational event they are able to, including ones that don't necessarily target their industries. Vince mentioned the Canadian Dairy Expo as an example, talking about the types of technology that dairy farms use and considering how they could be put to practice on a sheep or cash crop operation. He said that for their family, labour is a limiting factor as the kids need off-farm jobs to support the growth of their farm businesses and can't always spend a day in a tractor or the barn as a result. Putting technology to use to find efficiencies or increase productivity will be an important task for agriculture in the future.

Throughout much of our interview, discussion came back to the concepts of trialing new ideas, collecting data and using research or innovation to move forward. Vince said he feels we've only scratched the surface of what agriculture is capable of and talked about finding solutions by testing ideas and chasing results. He wishes that every farm had their own research plot and that neighbours would be interested in each other's results rather than skeptical of the effort. Vince pointed out that research is difficult too - it's easy to have lots of enthusiasm when seed is going into the planter but following through to harvest and data collection can be tough. Sometimes limitations to equipment can make variety trials almost moot – things like not having scales on the grain buggy limits a producer's ability to collect results. Regardless of those challenges, planting variety trials or working in a side-by-side tillage comparison is valuable. His final advice: don't be afraid to try new ideas, share the results, and don't be judgmental of other producer's efforts.

When it comes to using data Vince noted that they are farther ahead on the lambing side than the cropping side. Heather keeps copious records in spreadsheets – including individual group data, flock production summaries, and historical data. He said that they don't have as much collected for the fields but again sees opportunities for the future. He mentioned that liquid manure operators use near-infrared (NIR) technology to be able to tell the nutrient value of manure going on the field in real time. He noted how valuable that could be on a corn silage wagon, giving producers the ability to mark the side of their "ag-bag" where changes occur in moisture or protein and adjust their feed-out accordingly. All of these advancements are driven by a need from the producer he noted. At one point GPS and scales on their no-till drill were 'the need' but as solutions become accessible they are put into practice. Most of the time, access to the capital needed to make the investment is the largest obstacle to adoption.

Vince commented that he feels the biggest challenge in the agricultural industry has always been cash flow and access to capital. He noted that in the '80's it was more difficult to access loans, and that when they were offered they were for land only, not livestock or equipment. Although today it is easier to access a loan, the challenge of paying for it remains. Making the capital investment to start a business in agriculture, or to make a major investment on the farm is one of the most limiting aspects to a lot of operations.

Above: Early October frost on double cropped soybeans - the crop was fine and harvested normally.

Below: Double cropped soybeans and corn - planted after winter barley.

Discussion circled around to the family's involvement in Soil & Crop, and Vince remembered when Paul Legge asked Trevor to get involved as a Bruce SCIA director. Vince and Trevor discussed it, with Vince's comment being that it was likely "one of the best things he could do for himself".

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

He said that often the kids find themselves feeling pulled in different directions with jobs, farming, family and other commitments. His advice is to follow where their passion is. In the case of Soil & Crop, they enjoy the networking and learning, with a highlight being the summer crop tour. Vince said that Trevor attends each year and they have good discussions afterward over everything he learns and brings back to the farm. Vince also noted that thanks to the ability to meet virtually, even the time commitment for planning meetings is lower than when a person had to travel across the county to attend in-person.

I'd like to thank Vince and the rest of the Stutzki family for their willingness to share their story with me during a busy planting season. Their operation embodies a good deal of the innovative, data driven spirit that Soil & Crop tries to champion and I'm grateful to share a small bit of that through this newsletter. Thank you Vince & Heather, Trevor, Erich, Brendan & Micaela!

- Emily McKague

REPORTS FROM ACROSS THE REGION

GEORGIAN SCIA PROVINCIAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

ANDY VAN NIEKERK, P.AG., PROVINCIAL DIRECTOR, GEORGIAN CENTRAL

CELL: 705-446-5080

Well, the hustle and bustle of crop planting is nearly over and we hope for a successful season, which we have planned for over the winter months. Soon we will realize the fruit of our labour with a bountiful fall harvest (fingers crossed). …again…… "Every year is different, and this one is no exception."

In the provincial office we are finally coming to an end to filling our vacancies. This will help our provincial office be more productive as everyone returns to a normal workload. Our board is forever grateful to our Senior Management Team for rising to the challenge of managing the office with reduced staffing. In particular, our thanks to Julie Henderson for her dual role as Interim Executive Director and financial COO.

We are excited to announce that we have finally hired a new Executive Director. That person will start in July. Formal announcements will be forthcoming from our senior management team.

Our field staff should already have noticed the actions of Nicole Mackellar in the newly formed role of Director of Membership Services and Business Development. We welcome her experience and efforts.

Stacey McCarthy is our new Communications and Events Coordinator. I have been working closely with her and our team (Lorie Smith, Emily McKague and Matt Ververs) to plan out the OSCIA Summer Meeting this August 22-23.

Which helps me make this next announcement: the traditional responsibility of the 1st Vice President is to host the OSCIA Summer Meeting prior to stepping up to president at the AGM in February. This year the OSCIA Summer Meeting will be in Georgian Region at my farm. On August 22, my wife Lori and I will be host to everyone who wishes to attend the tour and educational day. The theme will be "Applied Farm Research" and we will cover some of the practical aspects of practical farm research.

As many of us know there are never any mistakes in our cropping process… just multiple test plots. …lol…

The following day, August 23, there will be a bus tour of agriculture in Simcoe County. All are welcome to either or both days. Please visit the OSCIA website for more information. Stacey McCarthy will be making announcements through Grassroots Matters and the Innovator, so keep an eye out for that. I hope to see everyone here.

Very best to all and stay safe! …. Andy

GEORGIAN SCIA PRESIDENT'S REPORT

GORD COUTTS, GEORGIAN SCIA PRESIDENT

CELL: 705-734-8545

Hello all, my name is Gord Coutts and I am the incoming president for Georgian Central Region Soil & Crop. I farm in the Midhurst area and am a member of North Simcoe SCIA.

I'd like to thank Brandon Dietrich for his work as Georgian Region president over the past couple years, he's done a great job of leading regional discussions and working to get events off the ground.

There are two major events in the works for Georgian Region in 2025 & 2026 to take note of:

First, Andy Van Niekerk is now the 1st Vice President for OSCIA. The 1st vice traditionally hosts the provincial summer meeting and tour, so Andy will be welcoming Soil & Crop members from across the province to his farm between August 22nd and 23rd 2025. Mark your calendars for the farm day on August 22nd – his theme is on farm research, and he has a lot of it to show. There will be guest speakers, plot tours, equipment demos and lunch so make sure to get there. On August 23rd there will be a Simcoe County bus tour, highlighting some unique farm operations and the Muck Crops Research Station. There will be lots to learn, and it'll be interesting to talk with Soil and Crop members from across the province. We hope you can make it.

The second event in the works is a Soil Compaction Day which would be held in 2026. At this point we're working on getting an organizing committee together to start on planning from there. We'll share more details as they come. If you'd like to be involved, reach out to Emily at Grey Ag Services: info@greyagservices.ca.

By the time you're reading this, planting will be wrapped up. I hope you've had a successful spring season and are able to make time for a mental break over the summer months. It's as important to take care of ourselves as it is to care of the farm – so set aside some time!

Take care, Gord.

BRUCE COUNTY PRODUCER SURVEY

Bruce County is developing its first Environmental Sustainability Action Plan (ESAP) and wants producer input. Take part in their survey **by June 22nd, 2025**.

Submit your response at: **www.brucecounty.on.ca/sustainability** or scan the QR Code to the right.