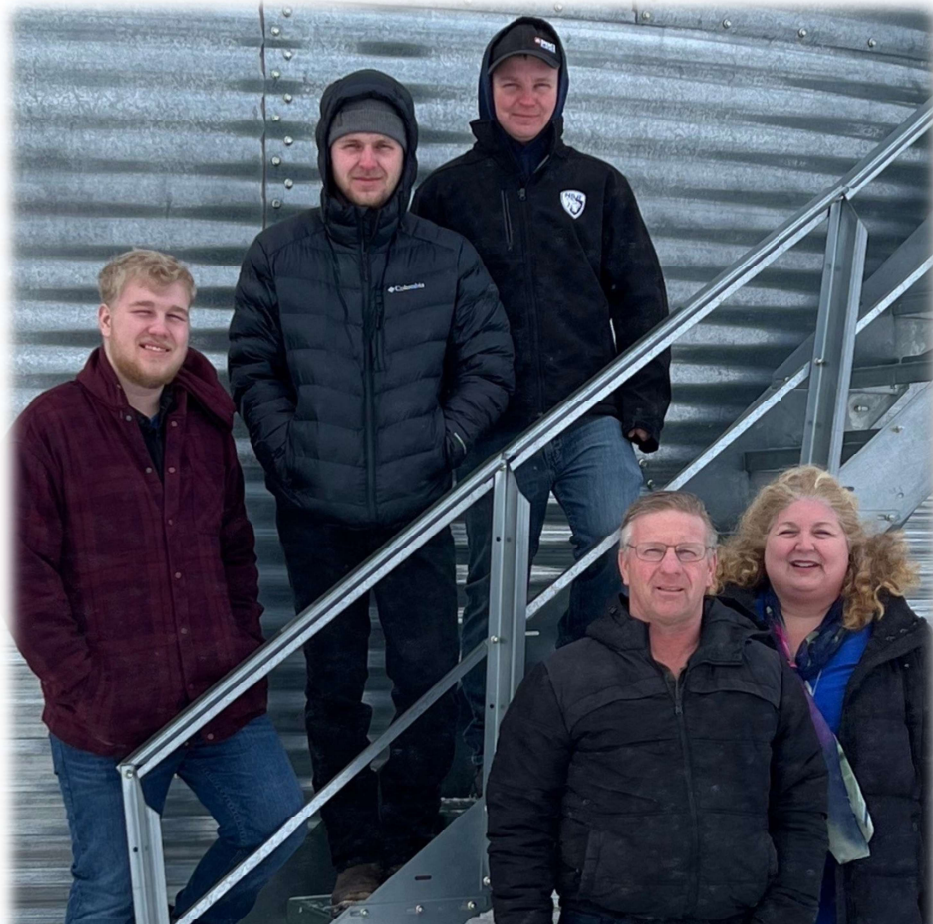


# ***Georgian Central*** **Soil & Crop Improvement Association** ***March Bulletin, 2022***

Serving Members of Bruce, Dufferin, Grey & North Simcoe Counties



**John & Anne Nahuis & Family, North Simcoe SCIA**

*Back left to right: Robert, Daniel and William, Front: John & Anne*



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# Member Spotlight

*Farming is a family operation for John & Anne Nahuis of the North Simcoe Soil and Crop Improvement Association. John commented that although their children have off-farm jobs and he is the main operator on the farm, when it gets to a busy time of year all hands are on deck.*

*The farm is located in Southern Tiny Township, in the Elmvale-Wyevale area of Simcoe County.*

## **The family**

John and Anne shared a little history of their family and farm with us. "Tony and Annie (Baks) Nahuis, [John's parents], immigrated to Canada in 1955 from Beltrum, Holland just after getting married." John commented that it was his father's dream to farm, but as the third son there was not room to stay in Holland.

Tony and Annie first worked at O'Conner's Holsteins in Ajax, and then moved to Aurora. John said, "With Dad working a job in a foundry in Richmond Hill and any extra work he could find at local farms, and Mom as a seamstress, they were able to save enough for a down payment and move to the home farm near Elmvale."

John went on to tell us that Tony and Annie had four sons and a daughter – Jeff, Roy, John, Tony Jr. and Mary. Tony and Annie sold cream and raised pigs until they purchased a neighbour's milk quota in 1967. Eventually three of their sons; Roy, John, and Tony Jr., were milking at separate farms and sharing labour when needed. The oldest son Jeff is now a retired engineer in Calgary and Mary recently retired from RVH Hospital.

Although his parents are now retired and living in their home in Elmvale, they still appreciate hearing about the activities going on at the farm. They both enjoy going for a drive with John in the growing season, which used to be a weekly event, but has gotten more difficult as their mobility decreases.

John worked at Somerville Farm Equipment his first winter out of high school but decided he would like to go back home to farm the next spring. John and Anne were married in 1991. They became partners with John's parents in the dairy farm while also separately increasing the farm size. When Tony and Annie retired, John and Anne purchased their share of the farm. They incorporated the farm in 2008. In 2016 they had to make the difficult decision to sell the Holstein herd, after John was told that the physical nature of his work was causing herniated discs and nerve damage in his arms.

Since selling the dairy herd, Anne splits her time between the farm and her family's business: Robert Ritchie Forest Products in Elmvale. The company does red pine reforestation thinnings, cuts their own lumber, and employs 25 people.

John and Anne have three sons, who all work off the farm but are on hand to help during the busy fieldwork seasons. Anne commented that the kids have been helping with farm work for as long as they have been able

to, and that the farm could not run as it does without them.

William (28) is employed locally at Wanless construction. He previously worked out west on a large crops, beef, and bison farm as well as doing pipe fitting. Daniel (26) currently works at Foresthill Fine Homes in Port Carling and gained experience working on large agricultural buildings in the Bradford Marsh. Robert (19) just graduated high school and is now working at MTH Manufacturing in Elmvale. He completed a co-op with a gas fitting and fireplace company and also worked for three years at the family sawmill. Anne says that their sons have learned a lot of skills through their off-farm employment which benefit the farm as well.

Not only is family an important aspect of their farm, but it seems community is too. John is the current president for the North Simcoe Soil & Crop Improvement Association. Both John and Anne were past directors of the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, and Anne is a long-time advocate of social issues in their area. They told us that their sons enjoyed 4-H, played many different sports, and are now involved in Junior Farmers as well.

## **The farm**

Nahuis Farms Inc. now includes about 710 acres of workable land, and 150 acres of bush lot. John said that their goal is to "crop for maximum yield without sacrificing the environment, knowing that each farm has its own 'personality.'" He also mentioned that going forward, maintaining good soil health will be especially important for their farm, saying "Undoubtedly our land has benefited from many years of having livestock, so now we need to do what we can to maintain and improve it."



*Anne doing fall tillage*

Their current rotation is wheat, corn, and then two years of soybeans which account for about half of their crop land. In addition to the cash crops, they have approximately 70 acres of hay which is permanent in areas not suited for cash cropping. He noted that they plant hay on soils that need to be covered, areas that are not tilled, smaller fields, and a sloping area that leads down to water. They still have their haying equipment and now market the hay to customers with horses.

They purchased a no-till drill about six or so years ago, and a vertical tillage tool more recently. Tillage



# Member Spotlight cont.

practices vary farm to farm depending on soil type and crops to be planted. He commented that no-tilling wheat into soys is easy, but most of the land that they will plant into corn is tilled, as he likes a dark, warm soil for that to get started. If the land is lighter, they do less in order to avoid wind erosion.

When I asked John if there was any sort of adoption curve involved with trying the reduced tillage practices, he said to keep in mind that there is no need to re-invent the wheel. His advice is to listen to what others have already learned as these practices have been around for quite some time. Many practices he uses today are ones that he learned from his father. He also mentioned that their previous drill did not have good depth control, and it was recommendations from others that helped him pick one which works better for them now.



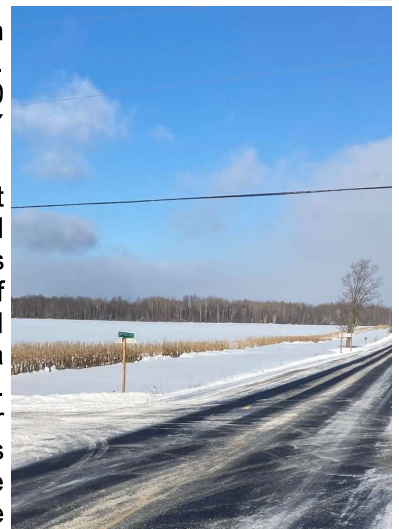
Filling the dryer bins

About five years ago they needed to upgrade their equipment for spraying and combining. They decided to try hiring custom operators instead, and it was “a good decision, [they] always have newer equipment with a good operator.” He said that there is a bit of patience required when you are used to doing the work yourself, but really, they are amazing. They come in, get it all done and do a good job. Additionally, the operators give the family yield maps of the fields, which tells them how their farms are producing, and what the fields are capable of. John also mentioned that he has added more grain storage on farm, which the operators like because they can harvest on a weekend and not need to truck it away. The storage gives the family more flexibility with regards to grain marketing as well.

The family does all their soil testing after wheat so that it is done on a consistent cycle. They spread the straw back onto the fields, to help keep organic matter on them. They also use oats as a cover crop after wheat harvest to keep the fields covered. They apply potash in the fall, and for the last few years have split their

nitrogen application on corn into two applications. They now apply 20 gallons of 28 UAN with Y drops in July.

John mentioned that Simcoe County reached out to some farmers along bad stretches of road to ask if they would leave a corn fence as a wintertime wind break. The corn works better than snow fence, saves the labour of putting one up and down, and the farmers are compensated for leaving it. He said they have had positive feedback from people driving along their road on how much it improves conditions, and that the deer and turkeys like the snack value! In addition to the corn fence, they have planted trees along the Wye River, and they would like to plant a windbreak along another field which has lighter soils.



The Nahuis' corn fence

## Looking ahead

John feels that a future challenge of farming is the rising cost of taxes, fuel, fertilizer, equipment, and land. Especially since the onset of the pandemic and supply chain issues, he advises not to wait on ordering anything for the farm. He also said, “Corn prices are looking good now but just like the last spike, inputs have also increased dramatically.” On their farm specifically, the family will have decisions to make around the use of old dairy barns, and consideration to spend on farm succession plans.

John looks forward to the coming year, with the possibility of gathering and learning. He says, “NSSCIA has always had a good membership, and our Seed and Feed Show and summer bus trip were always well attended (before covid). I hope this year provides more opportunities for our association members to engage and learn and enjoy farming.” He finished by commenting “We are in an area that has good farms - good soil and good water. We always seem to get enough rains from the winds coming off Georgian Bay. It's a nice place to farm. We are grateful for this and for family, friends and the farming community.”

*It was a pleasure to interview and learn more about the Nahuis family and their operation. I'd like to thank John and Anne for taking the time to put their thoughts together and share a bit of their story. Opening up for a regional newsletter is a daunting thing, but it brings value to the region as ideas are shared. Thank you so much John, Anne, and family!*

*Thanks also to the North Simcoe SCIA for suggesting the Nahuis Family as our member spotlight for this issue.*

*Emily McKague*