

## THE ONTARIO AGROLOGIST

A conversation with Karen Robinson, T.Ag.  
and an Independent Consulting Agrologist

**Q: Can you give a synopsis of your career to date?**

**Karen:** About 30 years ago I moved to the Dehi area, in the tobacco sand plains region of Norfolk County, to work with producers there and with the agricultural industry to look for potential alternative crops. This continues to be the ongoing focus of my career.

I received my T.Ag., or Technical Agrologist designation, in part through an associate agricultural diploma from University of Guelph, in part through continuous learning in my work within the industry and through my consulting work, as well as through the courses and examinations provided by the OIA.

**Q: What does this T.Ag. designation mean to you as a working professional?**

**Karen:** It seems that everyone working in a relatively specialized field today needs some kind of certification. So when you're able to show credentialed qualifications, your clients and your colleagues understand that you have a foundation of adequate training, and that you've invested your time to learn about the area that you're working in, which shows a sense of responsibility on your part.

**Q: What is a client's expectation of a Consulting Agrologist?**

**Karen:** A client is looking for accountability from the person being hired to do a job. When a client is embarking on a project, that person probably thinks that project is the best of its kind in the world. Now, someone who's trying to sell that person

something is probably going to just agree, and go from there. My purpose is to take a more objective view. I'm bound by a code of ethics and that relates to due diligence on my part, so it's incumbent on me to do the best job that I can for the client. As an accredited professional I'm obligated to look for gaps and potential flaws in the project. Then it's my job to inform the client and to help work to improve the process in order to make for a more successful overall project.

**Q: How do you generate business for yourself as an Independent Consulting Agrologist?**

**Karen:** I work mostly with food crops and I'm always looking for that new Ontario crop. I look for something that can be profitable, and fills a marketplace gap – something that meets needs in the food industry and for consumers.

**Q: Are you working on a project that you can discuss?**

**Karen:** Yes, a big project involves my client Jakeman's Maple Products in Woodstock, where we're processing maple syrup into maple sugar. This maple sugar product is an improvement over sweeteners currently on the market which seem to be lacking nutrient value. For example, maple sugar has more potassium than banana, while the more common sweeteners such as cane and beet sugars are lacking in potassium. In fact, studies have shown that most consumer sugars are inert of any nutrient value with the exception of carbohydrate.



Maple sugar is a premium product so it has potential for profitability, and we have a market for it. From a capacity standpoint, the Ontario Maple Syrup Association conducted a study some years ago showing that we have more available trees here than in Quebec. I've sent out some samples to industry sectors and there is interest from the beverage ice cream industries. And because the syrup used to make the sugar is lighter, the maple flavour can be increased or decreased to match the end product. We hope to have a maple sugar product out this fall. I'm very excited about this new 'made in Ontario' product and project.

*The Ontario Institute of Agrologists represents nearly 500 Professional (P.Ag.), Technical (T.Ag.), and Articling (A.Ag.) Agrologist members across Ontario's diverse agricultural industry. The OIA is based in Guelph. For a current listing of OIA Members, events and information go to the website shown below.*