

THE ONTARIO AGROLOGIST

A conversation with Michael Dick P.Ag., CCA-ON, and Agricultural Technician with the Essex Region Conservation Authority

Q: You hold a Professional Agrologist designation as well as Agronomist certification - has anyone asked you to explain the difference in the two terms?

Michael: I'm seldom asked about them at the farm level. Most farmers understand that agronomy is more soil and crop related, and so is a part of the broader agrology spectrum. But I have been asked about it in my own office setting, as I'm the only one there who works primarily with the local farm community. Conservation Authority people tend to come from the environmental side of things and they, like most people today, don't know much about agricultural issues. So I think that's just another part of my job, to educate non-farm oriented people about agricultural issues and concerns, and how technical terms like agrology and agronomy relate, within the broader scope of agriculture.

Q: So as the in-house Aggie, what are your responsibilities at the Conservation Authority?

Michael: My job has a range of components, but the larger part of it involves working with farmers to implement best management practices on their farms, such as planting wind rows, incorporating buffer strips, rock chutes, and conservation tillage programs. In the Essex County region, water quality management gets a lot of attention so I also manage a local program called Clean Water ~ Green Spaces. Most regional conservation authorities have their own Grant

programs. We get into things such as the upgrading of water wells and septic systems, with a basic purpose to improve water quality in the area. We also target phosphorous run-off from agricultural fields to clean up the water courses, and to lessen phosphorous loading into Lake Erie. That's a big issue, with the algae blooms so evident out in the lake.

I also manage a demonstration farm at one of our conservation sites in conjunction with several of our local industry partners and with our local Soil & Crop Improvement Association. We demo conservation and no-till practices, along with a wetland filtration demonstration where we can pump the water back into a field while looking at ways to limit water requirements, and monitor nutrient run-off from fields.

Q: Your P.Ag. designation was a requirement of employment at the Conservation Authority?

Michael: When I joined the Authority eight years ago, having my P.Ag. designation was a requirement of this specific position. My employers thought, rightfully, that this job required some credibility with the agricultural community I'd be working with, and a person with an Agrology accreditation would have the education, experience and knowledge to give solid agricultural advice. I also have a university degree in Horticultural Science in Agriculture from Guelph, along with a diploma from Ridgeway College.



Q: Why do you continue to maintain your OIA membership?

Michael: I go back to the credibility theme. Farmers today can get their information from anywhere. They have people coming at them all the time, telling them what they should be doing and what products they should use. Hopefully, they know that someone who is an accredited Professional Agrologist is coming from the angle of attempting to help them improve their entire operation. I try to take a bigger picture approach.

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.