

REAP - Canada field day in Tavistock attracts 250 !

By Dr Anne Weill, Laurence Tisdall and Chantal Foulds

More than 250 farmers, extension agents, OMAF representatives and others, from Ontario, Quebec and the United States, showed up at Harry Wilhelm's farm on August 30th. They came to see REAP's on farm research plots, a slide show explaining resource efficient agricultural systems that were being used and the agricultural machinery demonstrations. Naturally, the focus of the field day was on the proven ability to successfully and economically reduce or/and eliminate the need for herbicides and chemical fertilizers. Much emphasis was also placed on soil conservation conforming to REAP's research goals as being economically and environmentally sound.

The visitors could compare cover cropping systems in wheat, corn and soybeans. Vetch interseeded in wheat was especially impressive as a weed control agent. Other crops interseeded in winter wheat included crimson clover, red clover and an annual alfalfa: nitro. Catch crops seeded after wheat harvesting included buckwheat and oil radish. These enabled good weed control once the crop was removed and also helped in soil conservation. Similar interseeding trials were tested in spring cereals with comparable results. However, vetch when seeded too early could cause harvest losses because it often climbs onto the seed heads.

Many people were excited by Harry's soybean production system. Soybean yield was 50 bu/ ac despite having used no herbicide or fertilizer. Those interested in minimal tillage systems were pleased to see that by using the "rye mow-kill no-till" system (rye cover crop management) it is possible to have good soybean yields without any herbicide or tillage. Among the corn systems demonstrated herbicide and fertilizer banding along the rows permitted an 80 % reduction of herbicide and fertilizer by 50 %. This allowed interseeding crops which would protect the soil from September to next spring. Other demonstrations included seedings of vetch, ryegrass and vetch/ ryegrass mixtures under corn; manure managements plots in forage stands; and nutrient studies in com planted following winter wheat interseedings to determine how efficient cover crops can be in supplying nitrogen to com.

Machinery demonstrations included the "Mulch tiller" and "Aerway", both aid in achieving successful minimal tillage operations. Perhaps the most interesting display was a machine that looked like something from outer-space which enables seeding in full grown crops.

An excellent lunch was served by Lila Wilhelm along with organic coffee provided Thomas Nimmo. Thomas was largely responsible for the great success of the field day. With his creative ability in advertising he helped make this on-farm demonstration day the greatest one to date.

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