

Farmer to Farmer Technology Transfer Support

The need to increase the use of cover crops, to reduce tillage, to improve crop rotations, to increase the utilization of perennial forages and to improve manure management are often talked about as parts of an overall sustainable farming strategy. While the consensus is that these steps help, the sustainable farmer profile in this issue presents one farmer who has put it all together from the start. Lawrence Andres, of Tiverton, Ontario, was one of the first farmers in Canada to have a highly productive farm with these practices in place. Andres has been a major influence in helping the Ecological Farmers of Ontario take a leading role in the grassroots development of ecological farming.

This movement has come about as a result of farmers teaching farmers. In the developing world, farmer to farmer technology transfer is well recognized to be the most effective and low cost approach for implementing change. In the developing field of sustainable agriculture, farmer run field days and workshops are also seen by some as the ultimate exercise in information transfer. Yet extension activities done by anyone outside of government has received little credit, let alone financial support. On-farm research is getting credibility and funding because it is an effective complementary approach to institutionalized research. We should soon see similar interest in complementary approaches for extension. Professional farmers like Lawrence Andres have years of practical experience in sustainable agricultural methods. That experience is difficult to find and takes a long time and a lot of money to attain when training someone new to the topic. For the fastest, cheapest means to bring about change towards a more sustainable agriculture, go to the experts. Farmer to farmer technology transfer is one of the best ways to go.

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