



# IN THE TRENCHES

June 2012

*"Drainage Doesn't Cost - IT PAYS!"*

[www.drainage.org](http://www.drainage.org)

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## From the President's Desk

Fellow Members:

As I sit and write this, it's June 3! The past couple of days have brought some much needed rain to my local area, which has allowed us to finally get some maintenance done!

Warm, dry weather this spring allowed contractors to get an early start on things, taking pressure off a heavy work load. We can only hope that Mother Nature continues to be good to us and allows us to have a long fall season as well.

One concern that LICO has is regarding some of the farm shows that we attend in the winter. The Toronto Farm Show is not well attended and the London Show is having a hard time rounding up man-power for the LICO booth. We are looking at removing ourselves from both of these shows unless our members give the executive some feedback regarding these situations. The Executive is also asking for input as to whether or not the Ottawa Farm Show would be worth entering. Your feedback would be much appreciated. Please contact any member of the Executive to discuss.

In closing, I wish you an enjoyable summer. Play safe and have fun.  
Greg Walker

## Drain Research Program Funded - (Excerpts, Ontario Farmer, April 3, 2012)

An Eastern Ontario conservation authority has been given close to \$640,000 by the federal government to continue investigating controlled tile drainage for improving water use, nutrient retention, input management, yields and even in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

South National Conservation has conducted research into controlled drainage over the past five years, installing some 90 structures designed to regulate field flow.

Water is retained when conditions are too dry and released when there's too much. Testing has been conducted on several farms.



## Lines from Lambton - Dean Hodgson

Lambton County farmers have enjoyed the mildest winter and the driest spring within memory. Although there were not as many acres of fall wheat seeded, most of the crop appeared to come through the winter very well. However, the extremely dry spring weather and some late frost have caused some of the wheat fields to be sprayed in preparation for another crop. But most farmers are happy with the weather compared to last year when many crops were seeded in June. This year, sugar beets were planted in March and they have been doing very well to date. By the end of April most of the corn crop was in the ground and everyone was anxious to get started with the soybeans. Though only a few acres of soybeans were planted before May 15<sup>th</sup> now everyone is in the fields as we have had a few warm rains. Actually the weather in 2012 has been almost too good to be true.

Most of Lambton County tile drain contractors are off to the earliest start in their careers and some have actually worked in every month of 2012. Ken Jaques, Allan Jardine and Wayne Dupius of the Petrolia area have already completed all of their spring work but are still busy with many more jobs ahead. Don McGee has been working on the lighter soils in the Tupperville area of Kent County this spring. The Vokes Brothers were working for Howard Marks, right inside the City of Sarnia and on the old Wawanosh Lake bottom, where usually the Canada geese are feeding. All of our contractors are busy and working under ideal conditions. Load after load of tile trucks are driving up and down the County roads delivering tile. All in all it looks like a good year for all of agriculture here in Lambton County.

Tile drainage seems to be getting a boost from the federal government this year. An article in the Ontario Farmer stated the government has granted \$640,000 toward the "controlled drainage project" under the direction of the South Nation Conservation Authority. In the May 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Ontario Farmer, it appears the federal government is easing the powers of the Fisheries Act concerning agricultural drains. It would appear some are beginning to realize we cannot live on fish alone. Perhaps Sid Vander Veen was right when he felt everyone is coming onside in favour of tile drainage. Now if only the Ontario government would realize that growing food is more important than manufacturing solar panels!

## Am I getting old?

Just a line to say I'm living, that I'm not among the dead,  
Though I'm getting more forgetful, and mixed up in my head.

I've got used to my arthritis, to my denture I'm resigned,  
I can manage my bifocals, but God I miss my mind.

For sometimes I can't remember, when I stand at the foot of the stair,  
If I must go up for something, or have I just came down from there?

And before the frig so often, my poor mind is filled with doubt,  
Have I just put some food away, or have I come to take some out?

And then there's times when it is dark, with my nightcap on my head  
I don't know if I'm, retiring or just getting out of bed.

So, if it's my turn to write you, there's no need to get sore,  
I may think that I have written, and don't want to be a bore.

So, remember that I love you, and wish that you were near  
But now it's nearly mail time, so must say "goodbye" my dear.

There I stood beside the mailbox, with a face so very red.  
Instead of mailing you my letter, I have opened it instead!

## Sombra Outlook Ad — Printed Around 1900

The following advertisement proves that farmers have been tiling land and feeding the world for much longer than our governments seem to realize. This ad was printed about 1900 in the "Sombra Outlook", an early Sombra village newspaper. It was discovered in the Sombra Museum Archives by Glenda Young in 2012.

### WANTED A Home on a Farm.

Will work day and night and Sundays, summer and winter;

Work the hardest when I am full but am always ready for what is to do.

Will agree never to leave the farm nor interfere in any way with your horse trades.

Will not keep the hired girl up late at nights, nor elope with your best driver on Sundays.

Will not swear at the biscuits when there is company,

Nor show the watermelon patch to the boys.

Will not track mud on the kitchen floor nor smoke cigarettes in the haymow.

Am not afraid of rain nor hot dry weather; hold the worlds' record for carrying water.

Have been especially trained and will guarantee that with my help your crops will increase twenty to fifty percent.

Will prepare your soil for cultivation earlier in the spring and will prevent soil from baking after heavy rain.

Will insure your crops both in wet and dry seasons, without extra charge.

Will prevent your soil from being carried off by surface working.

Will feed your livestock, pay your grocery bills, clothe your family;

Send your children to school, pay your taxes and burn your mortgage.

Am straight as a string and sound as a dollar, strongest and cleanest of my race.

Will contract for one hundred years of service, or more.

Have had years of experience and a clean record.

All I ask is an early burial!

You deduct burial expenses from the increase in the first year's crop.

Reference – J.H. Sipperell, Wilkesport, or any progressive farmer.

J.H. Sipperell operated the Wilkesport Tile Yard in Sombra Township, Lambton County from 1890 to 1920.

## **McGee Farm Drainage of Sombra Township - Dean Hodgeson**

Don and Glenda McGee operate McGee Farm Drainage from their family farm at lot 14, con. 9, of Sombra Township. Besides the drainage business they cash crop about 650 acres of land, growing mostly winter wheat and soybeans. Formerly Don's brother, Norman, was involved in the farming end of the enterprise but has retired due to health problems. Don carries on with two part-time employees. As a hobby they raise Fjord horses and this provides Don an excuse to travel down into the U.S.A. to observe Mennonite farming practices. Don is continually seeking to explore the unknown.

It was Don's father, Jack McGee, who started the family drainage business back in 1972. When Jack was unable to hire a contractor, he bought a Buckeye '301' and with the help of his sons and advice from a neighbour, began tiling his own farm. The neighbour was Ron Tulloch who had been a partner in the Holmes, Barnes and Tulloch drainage business since the 1950's. However, when this partnership came to an end in 1976 Jack McGee bought their Buckeye "302" and Ron Tulloch came along to operate the machine. Ron Tulloch's years of experience and good reputation helped establish the new McGee Drainage business. As this was the period when all contractors had to pass the provincial examinations to acquire a Class 'A' Operators license, young Don McGee, just out of high school, went off to Ridgetown College along with Jack and Ron and also passed the Class 'A' Drainage Examinations. However, because of his youth, Don was only given a 'B' license that year but returned for the 'A' license in 1977.

The new company worked very well with Ron Tulloch and John Bishop supplying the experience for Jack and his sons. John Bishop was from another tiling family who once owned the Wilkesport Tile Yard. The McGee Farm Drainage worked mainly in Sombra Township and south into the Wallaceburg-Tupperville areas of Kent County. During those early years they installed mainly Dresden clay tile especially known for tight fitting in the sandy soils of the tomato fields. McGee Farm Drainage encountered many different types of soil as there were many tomato farmers in the Kent area. It was all good training for Don, working in the rich sandy soils where they often encountered "quick sand" and then the stiff clay soils of north Sombra where the flat grade was a real challenge. Always looking to improve, McGee Drainage next bought a Speicher "6060" Wheel Trencher and installed a Laser Grade Control. Then a Speicher "7060" which Don still uses to install main drains. In 1980 they bought a Canteco Drainage Plow and it was all plastic tile from then on. In 1982 Jack McGee expanded into Municipal drainage work purchasing a '980' Case Excavator. Don has continued to expand this side of McGee Drainage business, buying a Buckeye Super "7" in 1993 and a "long reach" EX270LC Hitachi Excavator for the deep drainage ditches in Kent County in 2003. In 1990 they purchased a completely new Laser Grade Control system and a 250 Wolfe Drainage Plow in 1998. In 2000 Don purchased a GPS Mapping and Survey System.

Don McGee started into the drainage business right out of school but he was surrounded with knowledgeable people. Don learned as they worked and over the years gradually took control of the entire operation. Don McGee is noted as a hard worker, spending long days in the drainage business and long nights in the farm fields. He is an enthusiastic optimist who sees only good times ahead and so keeps striving to finish the job at hand so he can seize the next opportunity. Don's father, Jack McGee, passed away in 1997 but was involved in the working end of the business right to the end.

In 1981 Don McGee married Glenda Ross and they built their own home on the farm. Don and Glenda have two children, Gillian, who obtained her Nursing Degree in 2012 and their son Eric, who graduated from the CPET program at Lambton College and is now employed at Nova Chemicals.

Don and Glenda are great travelers and have spent many winters travelling across the southern states in their motor home. In 1995 Don drove the whole family all the way to Alaska. Don and Glenda visited Cuba this past winter, have been to Australia and New Zealand and are planning a South American cruise for next winter.

Don McGee is a tireless worker but also knows we must take the time to relax and enjoy life. Don lost his mother at a young age and when his father Jack passed away, Don realized we must make the best of every day.

## **OMAFRA Drainage Coordinator's Report – Sid Vander Veen**

### TILE DRAINAGE PLANS

So you're looking at purchasing some farmland – 100 acres, advertised as tile drained. The location of the farm is good, the soil looks healthy and has good organic content. But it's nagging you – what value do you put on the claim that the land is tile drained?

It's a very valid question. I recently had a discussion with a farmer who purchased some land that was advertised as tile drained. He had the expectation that it was systematically tiled. When working his newly purchased property, the farmer found that he was not satisfied with the performance of the tile drainage system. He arranged for a contractor do some exploration on the tile drainage system and discovered that there was a single tile run in the whole property. He said to me "I guess it wasn't a false claim – I just didn't ask how much tile was in the land."

When purchasing a property that is advertised as "tile drained", here are some words of advice:

- Ask to see the tile drainage plan. If the seller can't produce a plan, take the approach that there is no tile drainage unless the seller proves otherwise. Ask to be shown the surface inlets and system outlets. Ask if the seller has any photos of the land in spring time that shows the land drying out over the tile runs. Ask for the name of the contractor who installed the system and if the contractor is still in business, go speak to him or her.
- If the seller does produce a tile drainage plan for the property, judge its value:
  - Some plans were design plans that were prepared before the system was installed. However, this doesn't mean that the tile drainage system was ever installed or that it was installed according to the plan.
  - A tile drainage system installed by a licensed tile drainage contractor has value. It shows that the system has been designed and installed by an individual who has received training and has apprenticed under an experienced operator. The licensed contractor knows how to survey a property and design a tile drainage system that will drain even the lowest points on the property. He'll know when to use filter on the pipe and how to size the tile. He'll know how deep to install the tile to avoid crushing and entry by tree and crop roots. The contractor is a professional. If you discover a problem with the system at a later date, the licensed contractor is also accountable for the work.
- A self-installed tile drainage system raises significant concerns. The situation is similar to a barn where the electrical system has been self-installed by the owner. While it is possible that the wiring is fine, it is also possible that it is faulty and the barn could burn down. A poorly installed tile drainage system can create wet spots on the land and can be worse than having no tile drainage system at all.

If you're arranging to have tile drainage installed on your property, make sure the contractor is a licensed professional – any contractor installing tile on agricultural land without licenses is operating illegally. Make sure that the delivery of a tile drainage plan is part of the price of the job. Many professional tile drainage contractors are now using GPS systems, so you could also ask for a copy of the GPS data. Finally, keep this information in a safe place – when you sell the land at some time in the future, the plan could be money in your pocket.

## **Farmers, CA Create Common Sense Wetlands Policy** - (Excerpts, Ontario Farmer March 27, 2012)

City of Kawartha Lakes - It had all the makings of a war last fall, with 40 angry farmers stomping into a conservation authority boardroom incensed that a heavy-handed, costly wetlands policy was about to be foisted upon them.

The tone was totally different last week. "We told them we are conservations," Keith Thurston said last week after reviewing the revamped regulation of development, interference with wetlands and alterations to shorelines and watercourses document presented at a public meeting.

"I'm a fifth generation farmer here. Did they really think we are going to pollute the water so we would not have it for the future?"

Development which straightens, alters, diverts or interferes in any way with existing channels of rivers, creeks, streams or watercourses will still be regulated.

But farmers will have the freedom to crop, pasture, clear fencerows, remove stone piles, create livestock watering ponds, tile drain and ditch in most cases provided the work is "consistent with the natural drainage grade."

Farmers will not require permits to work with isolated wetlands if that work doesn't impact neighbouring properties.

They can also, in some cases, remove isolated wetlands which impede their ability to farm, provided they create or expand another wetland somewhere else on their farm and the wetland is not provincially significant.

Common sense buffer zones are created around wetlands, assessing the zones according to vegetation, site conditions, the type of the proposed development and the wetland sensitivity. Vegetation within the buffer zone can be managed "providing the integrity of the buffer remains intact."

Under certain conditions bed-level crossings will be permitted, and even some watercourse alterations are allowable if all feasible alternatives have been explored.

## **Proposed Fisheries Law Could Benefit Drain Cleanouts** - (Excerpts from Ontario Farmer, May 8, 2012)

Section 35 of the Fisheries Act requires an environmental review before someone can alter or destroy a body of water that is vital to the life cycle of fish. Ottawa plans to remove the reference to habitat and instead place protection on fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or aboriginal fishery.

Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield said it makes no sense to extend a flood drainage ditch the same protection as the Great Lakes.

Ashfield said the changes will allow the department to focus on real threats like invasive species.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities also supports the change. President Berry Vrbanovic says, "The changes will make it faster and less expensive for local governments to perform routine public services from clearing ditches to repairing storm water systems."

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 22 & 23, 2013  
LICO Conference  
Best Western Lamplighter Inn  
591 Wellington Rd.,  
London, Ontario N6C 4R3



# Last one in is a cat!!



**Land Measure** Tom Dorn, Extension Educator (Excerpt from Land Measure Article found on website  
<http://lancaster.unl.edu/ag/factsheets/291.htm>)

### *Measure of Area*

**ACRE** — The unit of land area in the United States is the acre. An acre contains 43,560 square feet. Have you ever wondered why an acre is 43,560 square feet instead of a round number like 40,000 or 50,000 square feet? The story goes like this. When plowing with a yoke of oxen, it was standard practice to rest the animals (and the farmer) after plowing a furrow 1/8 mile long. An eighth of a mile therefore became known as a furrow-long or furlong; (a furlong is a nearly forgotten term for distance, except at horse racing tracks where it remains in common use).

The usual practice after plowing a furlong was to then turn the team around on a "land" and plow the other direction. Lands were laid out so the farmer would be able to finish a land every 10 rounds with a 10 inch plowshare (about 16.5 feet). One could imagine that perhaps farmers used a pole or rod that was 16.5 feet long when laying out lands because this measure of distance is still called a rod today.

By starting early in the morning, two lands could be finished before noon with a good yoke of oxen. At noon, the farmer stopped for his noon meal and to feed, water, and rest his animals. After the noon break, another two lands could be finished before quitting time. Four lands, or forty rounds (80 furrows) measured 16.5 x 4 = 66 feet across by 1/8 mile (660 feet) long and was considered a good days work with a walking plow. The area plowed was therefore 43,560 square feet and became the standard unit of land area we call an acre.

By the way, a farmer who plowed 80 furrows an eighth of a mile long would have walked ten miles while wrestling with the hand guided walking plow. Is it any wonder this measure of land area became known as an acre (ache-er)! Actually, the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary states that the name comes from the Old English 'aecer'; akin to Old High German 'ackar' (field), Latin 'ager' (field), Greek 'agros' (field), or Latin 'agere' (to drive).