



IN THE TRENCHES

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From the President's Desk

Greetings LICO Members,

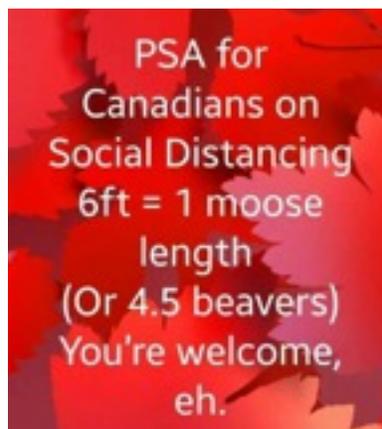
Over these last few months, since the start of the pandemic and the start of our spring season, I felt that maybe having to shut down for several weeks was the answer. Since our industry provides an essential service we all decided to keep going, feeling fortunate to be able to do so, and we are working long hours and are restricted in our contact with our family and co-workers.

I feel this pandemic hasn't really affected me directly with the day to day operations, other than washing our hands more often and maintaining the required social distance from fellow workers. When you consider our alternatives it wasn't too bad of a compromise. I'm positive this is the way of the future for most, if not all of us.

After talking to fellow board members, we will do our best to maintain the 2021 convention but this will depend upon regulations in place later in the year with regards to regional access, venue restrictions for the number of people that can gather at one time and whether speakers are able and willing to make an appearance. We will be sure to keep you informed.

As always if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me or any other LICO board members.

Jason Van Gorp



OMAFRA Update – Tim Brook

Contractor Courses

In 2020, the Primary and Advanced Drainage courses were offered through Ridgetown College in January through March at the Marden Community Centre just north of Guelph.

The Primary Drainage Course is now a 4-day course that was taught by Matt Williams and Trevor Dunn. This was the 2nd year (2019 & 2020) that the course has been taught by LICO members and administered through Ridgetown College.

The Advanced Drainage course was not offered in 2019 and has been reconfigured for the 2020 offering. The course is now only 6 days (Monday to Saturday) including the exam and there is also a pre-learning module that needs to be completed online prior to the start of the in-class portion of the course. The course was taught by Jeremy Reaume with support from Matt Williams with three topics being taught by Andy Kester (Operator - Roles & Responsibilities and Landowner – Responsibilities & Resources) and Tim Brook (Legislation).

The enrollment and course results are provided in the table below:

COURSE NAME	2020 DATES	Attendance	Pass Rate
Primary Drainage Course	January 13 – 16	21	90%
Primary Drainage Course	March 9 – 12	14	79%
Advanced Drainage Course	February 24 – 20	22	82%

If you are interested in taking either of these courses in the winter of 2021, check out the Ridgetown College Business Development Centre website later this year: <https://bdc.ridgetownc.com/takecourse/>

Inspections

Andy Kester is the province’s drainage inspector under the Agricultural Tile Drainage Installation Act and has been quite busy performing inspections as well as his many other duties and responsibilities. In 2019, the following inspections were completed:

- Business – 4
- Machine Operator – 5
- Machine – 6
- Quality of Workmanship Complaint – 2
- Report of Unlicensed Operator* – 3

*The three (3) unlicensed inspection files are still active and open. Initial follow-up and inspection have been done and we are working through the options for next steps in each case.

There are a larger than normal amount of operator inspections that have been queued and Andy will be working to get those scheduled over the upcoming work season.

In light of the recent COVID pandemic, OMAFRA is investigating the options to conduct some inspection activities remotely / virtually using technology such as video conferencing. It is envisioned that this may be able to replace or supplement in-field inspection activities for certain inspection types and circumstances. This process is in early stages – stay tuned for more details.

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OMAFRA Update - (Cont'd. from Pg. 2)

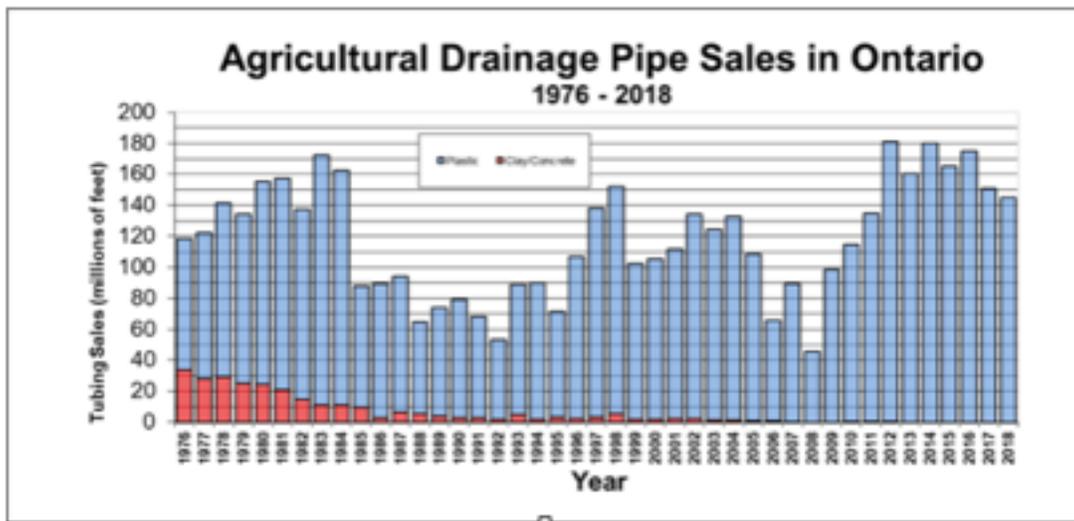
Tile Sales Data

Each year, OMAFRA requests that the various tile manufacturers provide a summary of the amount of tile that is sold in the province. We have been collecting this data for many years and have aggregated this data in the table and chart below.

Length of Agricultural Drainage Pipe Sold in Ontario in 2018:

Sizes	Length (feet)		Total
	Plastic (no filter)	Plastic (with filter)	
All sizes <4"	658,648	14,252	672,900
4"	103,244,467	34,232,645	137,477,112
6"	3,081,082	1,367,848	4,448,930
8"	1,016,084	388,984	1,405,068
10"	410,521	143,345	553,866
12"	311,838	91,889	403,727
All sizes > 12"	60,138	4,245	64,383
TOTAL	108,782,778	36,243,208	145,025,986

The request for the 2019 sales data was sent out earlier this year and is expected to be returned to OMAFRA by June, 2020 from the various manufacturers.



COVID-19 Barriers to Municipal Drain Projects

For LICO members from municipalities and engineering firms, municipal drains are vital infrastructure and also form a significant part of their work. For LICO tile drainage contractors, municipal drains are very important as an outlet for agricultural tile drainage systems. The following letter was sent to local MPP's in Middlesex County identifying the barriers that COVID-19 has presented to municipal drain projects under the Drainage Act. With the inability to hold the public meetings required by the Drainage Act, important projects have been stalled.

May 7, 2020

Mr. Jeff Yurek,
MPP Elgin-Middlesex-London
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Mr. Monte McNaughton,
MPP Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
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Strathroy, ON N7G 1X6
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Dear Jeff and Monte:

Municipalities across the province are coping with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are all doing our part to protect our citizens and employees by practicing good hygiene and social distancing. Many of our council meetings are being held electronically while still allowing for public participation in the process.

The government of Ontario should be complimented for their timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid enactment of legislation to assist municipalities to be able to continue to provide essential services while reducing the need to physically interact with the public. Changes to several key pieces of legislation, including the Planning Act, are allowing for municipalities to continue moving forward with approval processes so that when business returns to normal these projects can move forward without delay.

Unfortunately, one key piece of legislation was overlooked. Municipal drains are of critical importance in rural Ontario and the viability of agriculture across the province. The Drainage Act provides guidance and regulation to municipalities for the design and construction of municipal drains that includes a robust public consultation process. Under the current regulations several public meetings are required and there are no provisions for the use of technology to avoid bringing groups of people together for these meetings. The inability of municipalities to hold these meetings will make it virtually impossible for any drainage projects to be constructed in 2020 creating significant hardship to farmers and other residents of rural Ontario.

We would urge you to work with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to enact changes to the Drainage Act to permit the municipal drain process to proceed with modified public consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,
Chris Traini, P. Eng County Engineer /kb

LICO Board Letter to Members - Emailed to membership March 26, 2020

Dear LICO Members:

March 26, 2020

As a result of the COVID 19 virus, on March 23, 2020, the Province of Ontario ordered the mandatory closure of all non-essential businesses, effective as of Tuesday, March 24th at 11:59 p.m. This closure will be in effect for 14 days with the possibility of extending this order as the situation evolves. The Province also included a list of essential businesses that are exempt from this requirement (www.ontario.ca/page/list-essential-workplaces) and this list includes, among other activities, the following:

Agriculture and Food Production

- 21. Businesses that farm, harvest, process, manufacture, produce or distribute food, including beverages, crops, animal products and by-products, aquaculture, hunting and fishing*
- 22. Businesses that support the food supply chain including assembly yards, livestock auctions, food distribution hubs, feed mills, farm equipment suppliers, feed suppliers, food terminals and warehouses, animal slaughter plants and grain elevators*

Agricultural drainage is not specifically included in the list of essential "businesses that support the food supply chain...", item 22, but the businesses listed are only examples. Agricultural drainage could be interpreted to be an essential business that supports the food supply chain, but everything is changing daily and rapidly, and there is no place to obtain clear answers.

Therefore, use your discretion; as a business owner, you are responsible for making the final decision about whether or not to conduct business. If you decide that installing tile drainage is an essential business supporting the food chain, then follow these recommendations:

- Be safe! Use precautions on top of your precautions! If one worker gets the COVID 19 virus while working for your business, it's not worth it.
- While there is no opportunity to "work at home", give your employees the right to decide not to work. These are uncertain times and if they make a decision to not work, it should not be held against them.
- Make records of the efforts you are making to keep the workplace safe; for example, drive separately to the job site, daily remind your workers to maintain social or physical distancing, keep all non-crew personal away from the job site. Have disinfectant available at the job site including in each truck and in the cab of all equipment. Be forceful with any worker that disregards these instructions.
- If you are installing tile drainage in a non-agricultural setting (e.g. road drainage, golf courses, sports fields), it is difficult to see that this would be considered essential work. LICO recommends that this work be postponed until a later date.
- Be safe! Yes, this is a repeat, but it is very important.

Your 2020 Board
Land Improvement Contractors of Ontario

Compaction, Headlands and Narrow Spaced Tile! - Peter Johnson

There is incredible interest in the project on narrow spaced tile, kick started by Middlesex Soil and Crop Improvement Association, and generously supported by Tony Kime of Bluewater Pipe. The hope is to install 10 locations, and follow them for a minimum of 5 years, and hopefully 10 years. "Narrow" spacings go as low as 10', and as wide as 15' depending on location. Veritas is helping to analyze the data, to make sure the results are scientifically sound. In the meantime, what should LICO contractors be recommending to growers?

Enter my wheat crop! Wheat is simply an amazing crop: this spring, the variations in colour have told us an incredible amount about nutrient release and availability in the soil. One of the first things wheat taught us this spring? How badly we compact our headlands. Countless fields of beautiful wheat, with excellent stands everywhere EXCEPT the headlands. The headlands are simply a mess, with winterkill, thin stands, and stunted growth. Despite the move to low pressure tires and tracks, we continue to beat up those headlands.

Soil is dynamic, and the interactions of our crop production system with soil are complicated. One of the things that we first noticed when we made the shift to low pressure tires, was how the soil reacted on the headlands. The field was wet, and a better answer would have been to wait for harvest. But the beans needed to come off. Combining the headland went fine, those tires floated over the wet soil and barely made a mark. Perfect! But as soon as we started going up and down the field and turning on the soil we had already driven on, the trouble started. When you hit those original tracks, it was as if all the carrying capacity of the soil had disappeared, and down you went. Something about that initial pass had squeezed particles together enough that they now acted almost fluid. Dozer operators in swamps tell the same story. I don't quite understand the soil physics of this, and hopefully someone that reads this article will explain it to me. But it happens!

We know we are going to beat up headlands, so the only management option we have is to put the tile closer together on the headland. If you want to do your clients a favour, convince them to add 2 more runs on the front headland where all the buggy and combine traffic concentrates (and maybe 1 more run on the back headland). We don't know where the whole "narrow spaced" tile project will land, but in the meantime, we know headlands are an issue. Let's fix that problem NOW!





Dennis Erb - November 14, 1949 - March 18, 2020

By chance I met Dennis on the sideroad close by the Roth Drainage Ltd. Shop in early March 2020. Not that unusual as we live close by. What was unusual was that this was March 12, 2020 and COVID-19 was by now on the news. I inquired as to what he was up to, to which the answer was, seeing a few customers. I proceeded to school him in the notion that persons of high risk, should not be out and about. Dennis was just that type of guy, taking care of his customers, without regard for himself.

For those of you that didn't know Dennis that well, Dennis cared about others, he cared for his customers, he cared for his family and he cared for his church. Dennis didn't care much about a clean truck, or if he got his good shoes dirty. Didn't care if Connie ran out of coffee mugs because his truck was full of them. Didn't care much about making money, or if he was eating properly or not. Dennis took care of his customers, he loved to talk to his customers, and his customers loved him back. His design was never about speed or efficiency of the company, but rather the efficiency of the system. His first thought was not of the price, his first thought was, how can he give more value. Of course, his big heart sometimes over promised on arrival dates, but his faithful customers always forgave and waited.

Dennis started his career right out of high school some 50 plus years ago. His first and only job, it was his career. We worked together those years with a 302 Buckeye and grade stakes and clay tile. When the opportunity came up to acquire the Roth Drainage company, Dennis became a partner. He remained a shareholder until a few years ago. We quickly transitioned to a D9 and Krac plough, Dennis was not a fan of change and this was a big change. Transitioning from grade stakes with transit to laser, and from clay tile to plastic tile. In those days it took 3 good crews to measure up to today's GPS, large rolls, and modern drainage ploughs. Change didn't just happen with equipment, it happened with his partners. In 1988 I left the business and Dennis stayed with shareholders Rodney Heipel and Gerald Neeb. A few years later, it was Gerald Neeb and Dennis, and finally today Mike and Gerald Neeb.

For a guy who didn't like change he changed without blinking an eye. On February 25, 2016 in the blink of an eye, life changed for Dennis. A complication of pancreatitis put him in Stratford General Hospital, then quickly to London Science Centre, where he spent the next 7 months in an induced coma, surgery and rehab. He had nothing short of a miracle recovery but this forced him to have three times weekly dialysis treatments. What did Dennis do, exactly what he loved to do, a few days a week, in his pickup talking and customers, well really friends.

As I thought about my time as a partner and friend with Dennis, I often think about lessons in life that you learn from such a steady person as Dennis. Back in the early days we would sometime talk about our competitors that were seemingly out-installing us or underpricing us, and we would always end up in the debate of design vs efficiency, vs profit. I remember on one occasion saying "Dennis, who will come to your grave and say "here lies the guy that really cared about my land and gave me the very best." Well I was wrong, really wrong. That is exactly what they are saying, and many are saying that.

Continued Pg. 8

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 19 - 21, 2021

LICO Conference

Best Western Lamplighter Inn

591 Wellington Rd,

London, Ontario N6C 4R3



Dennis Erb - *(Cont'd. from Pg. 7)*

Dennis lived his life his way, unassuming, generous and genuine.

Dennis was the husband of 46 years to Connie and devoted to his 2 children Brennan and Carrie and 4 grandchildren.

Also remembered and missed by the Roth Drainage team, Gerald & Mike, Shirley, Eric, Kevin and Kyle. His example of customer care will be forever a part of the Roth Drainage company culture.

The drainage industry and the farming community have truly had a great caretaker and he will be missed.

Ray Roth
Past President, LICO

