



# IN THE TRENCHES

September 2009

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

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

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## From the President's Desk

Fellow Members:

Here we are at the start of September and I am still waiting for those hot and lazy days of summer to arrive. I have to confess that a cold beer still tastes good even if it wasn't a 35 C day! Farmers are seen to be the ultimate masters on the weather scene, and I have to agree with them that a few more heat units would be appreciated for the fall.

I received a very interesting e-mail from Sid Vander Veen on where our food supply is really coming from. Here are some shocking numbers - we actually import 53% of our vegetables and almost all of our fruit. In 30 years our red meat imports are up 600%. The last 15 years imports increased 160% while our population only rose by 15%. Ontario imports 4 Billion Dollars more than it exports - this includes cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes, which we can grow locally. This is not just exotic fruits - for every apple we produce we import five, and for every pear we import 700. Personally, I feel embarrassed that I was not aware of these Import-Export percentages. The Kitchener-Waterloo area is surround by fertile farm land and the average home in the area has a meal that would have traveled over 4000 kms. before it lands on their plate. I ask that you talk with everyone you know that we need to choose Canadian whenever and wherever possible. For more info check out [eatrealeatlocal.ca](http://eatrealeatlocal.ca). Looking for Local produce can cost a little more - but supporting our local farmer builds a strong and vibrant community. Their bottom line is ultimately OURS!

Thanks again,

Gerald

## Summer Meeting, June/July, 2010

The Executive is considering a summer meeting in the Ottawa area for June/July 2010. The intention is to have a demonstration day in the area showing some local contractors working on a job, showcase water management practices and issues, and have the local Drainage Superintendents show some of their work. Tours of the museums in Ottawa would be arranged for those who choose to stay an extra day or two. Before making a decision, the Executive would like your response to such a meeting. Please contact the nearest director by October 15, 2009 to let them know whether you will come to the meeting or not. Based on the response a decision will be made.

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**Land Management Matters - Don Lobb, Environmental Advocate, LICO**

Land management impacts cropland drainage – particularly outlet drainage ditches.

Over the past 30 years a significant acreage in Ontario was committed to some form of no-till crop production. This was particularly important in reducing organic matter loss and in reducing soil erosion where we have complex topography.

Recently there seems to be a move to convert some of that land back to a tilled crop production system. This move appears to follow the practice of large farm operations taking charge of the management of formerly smaller well managed farms. I am well aware of instances where this back-shift in land management has occurred. The result is severe soil erosion, soil being washed into rivers and streams – and into drainage ditches. This is not a tolerable situation!

Land managers and their advisors must be made liable for the outcome of their decisions. There is no other way to protect soil productivity, water quality, and to minimize drain cleanout. Those cleanouts are costly and are increasingly matters of environmental interest.

***If everything is coming your way,  
you are driving in the wrong lane!!!***

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***You must be the change you want to  
see in the world.***

If you have articles, events or notes of interest you wish to add to this newsletter, please send your submissions (not more than 225 words) to the following:

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## Lines from Lambton - Dean Hodgson

The year 2009 has been a challenge for Lambton County farmers right from the start. The winter was wet and cold, the spring was damp and cool and many say that summer never came. But somehow farmers managed to get their crops in the ground and though spring grain and corn were delayed, most of the soybeans were planted by the end of May. But the wet cool weather persisted all through June and July so growth was slow, the corn looked stunted and the soybeans fields were riddled with yellow patches swirling through the swales. It was looking grim toward the end of July. Then about wheat harvest time the rainy season really set in and for a time it looked as if the wheat crop could become a real disaster. But finally the weather turned sunny and warm, combines hit the wheat fields and by the end of a week 90% of the Lambton County wheat crop was harvested. It was a sight to see, especially for an old-timer like myself, as these huge combines quickly ate up the golden acres of grain. Although there was a lot of wheat going through the driers the first few days, quality was generally good and yields were in the 70-80 bu./ac. range. Although 2009 was not a bumper wheat crop, most farmers were pleased with the results, as conditions had been poor throughout the entire growing season.

Just about wheat harvest time, the corn and soybeans suddenly started to grow. Sunny days, warmer nighttime temperatures and a few weeks later Lambton County crops were looking good with 6' high cornfields and lush, dark green soybean fields stretching out as far as the eye could see. Our Lambton County farmers breathed a sigh of relief as August brightened up the crop outlook and now everyone is hoping for good fall weather to fulfill the farmers' hopes of a good harvest. Most of the soybean fields appear to be RR and weed free, but there are patches of heavy weed infestation in some areas. Is this caused by the weather or cutting costs in the topsy-turvy world of agriculture financing?

I was talking with Steve Vokes in July and he was quite pleased with the prospect of a good profit from the Lambton County sugar beet harvest this year. In spite of poor growing conditions, the sugar beet crop is looking good. Vokes Bros. Farms have only 200 acres of sugar beets this year as a result of a quota cutback because of the over production in 2008. However, world weather problems have caused a global sugar shortage and sugar prices have increased by 30%. Although they had to make a huge investment in machinery and shares in the Michigan, USA, Sugar Co-operative, Steve feels their sugar beet venture has been an overall success and this may be the best year to date. At the same time the Vokes Bros. have been busy with their tile drainage business. During all the wet weather they were busy repairing tile drains on a 10-mile stretch of Union Gas pipeline installations on Churchill-Waterworks-Michigan road allowances. The Vokes Bros. have also been draining land for the 1000 acre Solar Farm being built north of the Churchill Line between Hwy. 40 and the Blackwell Road in Sarnia. It is a huge project and supposedly will supply hydro for 3000 homes once it comes on line in the next year or so. Once the wheat harvest was completed Steve, felt that Vokes Drainage had enough work lined up to keep them busy well into the fall.

We see Ken Jaques was busy with some big jobs down in the former Moore Township but has been hampered all year by wet weather. Allan Jardine has been tiling along the 6th and 8th concessions of Enniskillen Township most of this year. Like Ken they have been hampered by too many rainy days. One St. Clair Township farmer reported that he has to delay his 100-acre drainage project because Frank Rombouts is booked full for the rest of this year. We see that Roy Elliott and Harvey Ferguson have both cranked up their wheel machines and are preparing to help ease the load for some of the full-time contractors. This all sounds good for our Lambton County drainage contractors; now, if only the weather would cooperate we could make up for all the delays stretching back into the fall of 2008. But better days are ahead.

After years of worrying about the falling water levels in Lake Huron, we finally can relax our vigil as water levels are back up to normal in the St. Clair River at Sarnia. The water level at my marker in the river has risen about 1.5 feet from April to July of 2009. So with all the snow of last winter and all the rain this summer, the vast lake has returned to its 50-year average. However, now we learn that the City of Flint, Michigan, USA, is about to construct another 6' pipeline from our International

*(Continued Page 4)*

## **Lines from Lambton – (Cont'd. from page 3)**

waterway to supply water to meet the needs of their growing population. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources quickly gave their approval to proceed and so our Lambton County Water Commission followed the MNR recommendation and offered no objection. These are the people entrusted to guard our water supply. Where do they think all this water will be coming from as we continue to pump more and more water from our Great Lake? Strange how the MNR and the CA's ration water permits to farmers wanting to irrigate crops to grow food but glibly OK a 6' pipeline to a city where the water will not be returned to its source.

But I guess all we can do is keep digging and hoping that cooler heads will prevail, as there is considerable opposition to the plan in Michigan. It seems our bureaucrats at the MNR would rather fight farmers over a drain cleanout then protect our Great Lakes water for future generations.

## **Canada's Sickest Lake – (Excerpts from MacLean's August 24, 2009)**

Lake Winnipeg, the isolated prairie lake, ringed by pristine Boreal forest, tucked far from industry and major population centres, has become the sickest big lake in the country. Algae now grows to smother more than half the massive 24, 500-sq.-km lake most summers.

The culprit is nutrient overloading from fertilizers, human and animal waste. Nitrogen and phosphorous do precisely in water what they do on the land: cause plant life to run wild and multiply like crazy. The process is accelerated by the channelization of waterways to allow rapid runoff from farmer's fields, and the destruction of wetlands and riverbank areas. In the Red River Valley, which contributes 66 per cent of Lake Winnipeg's phosphorous load, wetlands have seen a hundredfold reduction. Manitoba's "hog boom" has seen the number of hogs on the watershed swell to 8.2 million, dumping an annual excrement load equivalent to at least 30 million humans. Alberta, the western limit of the lake's catchment area, has another eight million head of hogs and cattle.

In 2007, 122 Quebec lakes sprouted massive algal blooms, and last summer an algal bloom sprouted on the St. Lawrence River. Even Lake Erie has begun sprouting algal blooms and low-oxygen dead zones all over again.

Switzerland has kept its lakes largely free of algae by reducing agricultural runoff by 50 per cent over the past decade. Lake Erie was declared "dead" in the 1960s, but within a decade the five major cities on the lake's south shore managed to slash phosphorous loading by half, largely by updating wastewater treatment plants, which almost instantly reduce cyanobacterial blooms.

Getting Lake Winnipeg off death's doorstep will require similar-scale reductions to the nutrient load. Winnipeg is responsible for only six per cent of the load. The rest flows into the lake from diffuse, "non-point sources," including drainage ditches from farmer's fields, stormwater from Regina, phosphorous from dishwashers in Fort Frances and yard fertilizers in Calgary. More than half originates in the U.S.

The government of Manitoba has tabled tough draft legislation limiting fertilizer use in places, right down to zero. The province is also calling for restrictions in hog operations in some regions.

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

### *Changes to the Regulations:*

In consultation with the LICO Board of Directors, some changes have been made to the regulations under the *Agricultural Tile Drainage Installation Act*. The purpose of these changes was to clarify the regulations and to make it more convenient or responsive to the individuals and businesses being licensed under this Act. The revised regulations can be found in the following website: [www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws\\_regs\\_900018\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_900018_e.htm)

The following is a summary of the changes that were made:

- The business license has always expired on December 31 which is an inconvenient time of year for businesses that are still active in early winter. The expiry date for business licenses has now been changed to March 31. Here's what this means to tile drainage businesses in Ontario:
  - Your 2009 business license states that it expires on December 31, 2009, but for this year only, this business license is considered to be extended to March 31, 2010.
  - Business license renewal forms will be sent out to you in early February.
  - In order to renew your license for April 1, 2010, the renewal application form and fee (\$250) along with the tile records must be submitted.
  - Machine and operator licenses still expire on December 31.
- As part of the business license renewal, contractors are required to provide records of the work they completed in the previous year. The regulation formerly required contractors to submit these records within 30 days of completing the work. The regulation has been changed to reflect the actual practise, so now, by March 31, businesses are required to submit records of the work they completed in the previous year.
- For an individual to upgrade their machine operator's license, they must meet training requirements (Primary & Advanced Drainage Courses) and have a certain level of machine operating experience. The operating experience requirement was expressed in "months" which was very ambiguous. For clarity, the experience requirements for an individual to upgrade his or her operator's license has been changed as follows:

| <b>Machine Operator Experience:</b> | Previous Requirements | New Requirements  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| From Class "C" to "B"               | 3 months              | 250 hours         |
| From Class "B" to "A"               | 7 months (total)      | 500 hours (total) |

**Please note that operators who intend to upgrade their machine operator's license will now have to keep a log of the hours they have operated the machine.**

- Our Ministry periodically offers the Primary and Advanced Drainage Courses to contractors and the regulations formerly specified some of the course content. The regulations have been changed to make the course content more generic so we can modify the course content to reflect what is happening in the tile drainage industry today.

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## OMAFRA Drainage Coordinator's Report – (Cont'd. from page 5)

### *Tile Loan Program:*

As of September 1, 2009, a total of \$1.6 million in tile loans has been processed or is on hand. This represents loans in a 3-month period (July, August and September).

We occasionally get questions from contractors about the process required to get a tile loan cheque to a farmer. The following is a summary of the actions taken:

- Tile loans are issued under the authority of the *Tile Drainage Act*. This Act requires each loan or debenture to be issued for the first of a month.
- During the tile installation or immediately thereafter, the municipal tile inspector must inspect the tile installation job and complete an "Inspection & Completion Certificate". This certificate along with copies of the invoices and a sketch of the tile system is submitted to the municipal office.
- The municipal treasurer and/or clerk completes a debenture package that includes, among other documents, a "rating by-law" that imposes the repayments on the land that is receiving the loan. This rating by-law must be passed at an upcoming council meeting. In many municipalities, councils only meet twice a month so timing can be critical.
- After council approves and passes the rating by-law, the debenture is sent to OMAFRA.
- After a properly-completed tile drainage debenture is received in our office, on average it takes less than 4 working days for the loans to be approved for payment. If there are errors or problems with the debenture, they must be corrected before it can be processed.
- After OMAFRA approves for payment, it takes at least a week before the cheque is issued and received in the municipal office. Because of the average 4 days to process a loan and the week required until the cheque is received, we tell municipalities that the tile drainage debenture package must be received in our office no later than the 20<sup>th</sup> of the previous month in order for us to get the cheque to the municipality by the first of the month.
- When the cheque is received in the municipal office, the municipality contacts the loan applicant and transfers the funds to them.

"Youth is like spring, an over praised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits."  
- Samuel Butler



**Murray Albert Nesbitt 1951-2009** He loved heavy machinery and worked 30 years in a salt mine, making sure salt ‘spilled in the right places’ - Maclean’s, September 2009

Murray Albert Nesbitt was born on Sept. 5, 1951, in Brussels, Ont., just east of Lake Huron. With two older sisters and a younger brother, he was the third child of Florence and George Nesbitt, who had a farm outside Blyth, not far from Brussels. Both parents sometimes worked off the farm—Florence had a job at a grocery store, while George ran a farm drainage business—so the kids were often left to do the farm work and get supper on the table. Even then, Murray had a love of heavy machinery, helping his father when he could. “Once you get diesel fuel in your veins, you never lose it,” he used to say.

As a teen, Murray didn’t care much for school, and sports weren’t his thing, but he had many friends, and a wicked sense of humour. His sister Brenda Kitching recalls how, when she got married, she felt “disappointed” that Murray disappeared from the reception without saying goodbye. She and her husband left, unaware that her brother, then 18, had hidden in the back seat. “We drove about four miles, and then up pops Murray, having a laugh,” she says.

After high school, Murray took a job at a nearby trailer factory. Out and about in Blyth with a friend, he spotted Connie Nethery, a local farm girl, and strolled over “with the intention of getting an introduction,” she recalls. The two struck up a relationship, going on dates to the drive-in; they were married on April 28, 1972. The bride made her own wedding dress, which had an empire waist. “We had so much to talk about,” Connie says. “We could talk forever.”

The couple had a son, Jeff, in 1972, and a daughter, Cathy, in 1974. Connie initially stayed home with the kids, while Murray did shift work. In addition, “he had a ditching machine and a backhoe, and did work on the side,” says Jeff. “Dad told me I first ran a backhoe when I was two years old.” Murray was a member of the Lions Club, the Masonic Lodge, and the Royal Canadian Legion. A testament to his community involvement, he served as councillor for more than 14 years, first for the village of Blyth and later for the township of North Huron (amalgamated in 2001). “He was a great union man,” Connie says. “He believed in fairness above all.”

Yet Murray “had his demons,” says Jeff, who notes that his father battled alcoholism for much of his life. “He wasn’t home as much as the kids would like,” adds Connie. Cathy Nesbitt-Timmons, their daughter, admits she sometimes missed her father; yet her memories of him are happy ones. “I remember him saying, ‘I’ll take you for a drive and get you a treat,’” Cathy says. “He stopped at a farm stand and bought peas in a shell. That was his idea of a treat!”

In 1980, Murray took a job at the Sifto salt mine in nearby Goderich, where he would work for almost 30 years. Murray had many jobs, starting as a scaler (scraping salt off the wall), then blasting with dynamite. “His favourite was central control,” Connie says, which involved “making sure the salt spilled in the right places.” Yet mining could be dangerous: in 1981, “there were two fatalities in a two-week period, both of them on our shift,” says Allen Robb, now the union health and safety rep at the mine, who trained Murray. “It was hard to accept.” In 1996, Murray’s partner was buried in a salt pile. Murray dug him out with his bare hands; the man survived. The mining industry as a whole has gotten much safer since then, Robb says: in the early ’80s, about 20 miners across Ontario would die each year, he notes. Now, it’s closer to two. “If we can go from 20 to two, we should be able to get that to zero,” Robb says. “Murray and I would talk about that.”

In July, Connie retired from her job (she’d worked at Farm Credit Canada since 1980). That same month, Murray celebrated his five-year anniversary with Alcoholics Anonymous. A doting grandfather to five young kids, he “desperately wanted to make up for lost time,” says Cathy. He and Connie had purchased a trailer and were making trips to Arizona. At work, Murray had earned enough seniority to work above ground. Jeff took a job at the Sifto mine, too, and would drive to work with his father. Murray didn’t plan to retire till he turned 65.

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 20 - 21, 2010

LICO Conference

Best Western Lamplighter Inn  
591 Wellington Rd.,  
London, Ontario N6C 4R3



Canadian Water & Wastewater Association  
Conference on Water Efficiency & Conservation  
October 13 - 16, 2009  
Victoria, B.C.  
e-mail: [itsui@cwwa.ca](mailto:itsui@cwwa.ca)

## Murray Albert Nesbitt 1951-2009 – (Cont'd. from page 7)

On Aug. 25, a year to the day after Jeff began working at the mine, Murray was inside a storage dome, knocking down salt piles with an excavator. The excavator began to leak oil; Murray set about clearing salt away from the machine so mechanics could get in to fix it. "He must have been too close to the chute," Robb says. "They're covered with salt, so maybe he wouldn't realize." Although the incident is still under investigation, Murray somehow fell into a chute and was buried in salt. He was 57 years old.



## New Rules For Using Nutrients On Farms Become Law – OMAFRA News Release, September 18, 2009

### McGuinty Government Strengthens Standards That Protect Health and Environment

New rules that establish consistent standards and requirements for applying nutrients to farmland are now law.

This applies to nutrients called non-agricultural source materials (NASM), which include yard waste, fruit and vegetable peels, food processing waste, pulp and paper biosolids and sewage biosolids.

The rules ensure NASM applied to the land at every Ontario farm meet strict criteria and are beneficial to the soil. This will protect the environment and the health of Ontarians.

In addition, farmers accepting nutrients, haulers carrying it and those that generate NASM are now regulated by either the Nutrient Management Act (NMA) or the Environmental Protection Act (EPA), not both. This removes an overlapping approval process.

"It is only here in large portions of Canada that wonderous second wind, the Indian summer, attains its amplitude and heavenly perfection, -- the temperatures; the sunny haze; the mellow, rich delicate, almost flavoured air: Enough to live -- enough to merely be."

Walt Whitman, *Diary in Canada*