



SOIL CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF CANADA
CONSEIL CANADIEN DE CONSERVATION DES SOLS

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The face and voice of soil conservation in Canada

NATIONAL SOIL CONSERVATION WEEK



National Soil Conservation Week is a legacy of The Honourable Senator Herbert O. Sparrow, a passionate champion for protecting Canada's soil. Senator Sparrow's 1984 motion to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry "...to examine the subject matter of soil and water conservation throughout Canada", produced the report, *Soil at Risk – Canada's Eroding Future*.

The Senate Committee travelled across Canada interviewing farmers, academics, government officials and individuals and "...determined that we are clearly in danger of squandering the very soil resource on which our agricultural industry depends." Some action was already being taken by local groups in the

provinces but what seemed to be lacking was a body that could provide a national "voice" for soil conservation needs.

In 1987, Senator Sparrow became the Founding President of Soil Conservation Canada, which would become the Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC).

As thoughts turn to spring planting and seeding, so do thoughts regarding soil preparation. While pondering their spring tillage options, farmers should take a few minutes to seriously consider the impact on the soil. Although tillage may provide perceived benefits, the damage done to soil structure, organic matter and soil micro-organisms can be devastating. Soil erosion continues to be a major concern across Canada and eliminating tillage is one way of keeping the soil in the field. Dust storms across the Prairies, phosphorus entering the Great Lakes and fish kills around Prince Edward Island can be attributed to soil erosion due to tillage. With direct seeding or no-till planting, huge reductions in soil erosion are achievable.

No doubt that Senator Sparrow would be pleased that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has declared 2015 International Year of the Soils. "The multiple roles of soils often go unnoticed. Soils don't have a voice, and few people speak out for them. They are our silent ally in food production" stated José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General.

Canada's contribution to the UN-FAO's report on soils for International Year of the Soil is led by Dr. David Lobb,

Department of Soil Science, University of Manitoba. "Healthy soils are fundamental to the sustainability of agriculture in Canada. Erosion removes topsoil, reduces soil organic matter and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure. This adversely affects soil fertility, movement of air and water into and from the soil surface and, ultimately, crop yields and profitability. Yields from severely eroded soils may be substantially lower than those from non-eroded soils in the same field", said Lobb.

Canadian farmers have already done a lot to help conserve soil resources, although more needs to be done. More extension efforts in the area of soil conservation and a greater awareness of the problems and potential solutions need to be explored and promoted. The SCCC will be leading the charge as the face and voice of Soil Conservation in Canada. Paul Thoroughgood, chair of SCCC, stated that "Every single Canadian should be concerned about soil health and soil care. Stewardship of our soil is fundamental, not only our survival, but more broadly the environmental value Canadians often take for granted."

National Soil Conservation Week is a wonderful way to celebrate Senator Sparrow's dream, his mission and our role in continuing his legacy. SCCC is a national, non-governmental, independent organization, formed to provide a non-partisan public forum at the national level for soil conservation. New members and collaborators are needed. Simply visit www.soilcc.ca and click on 'Join SCCC.'

The legacy and vision continues.

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April 19-25, 2015