

Conservationist named 2020 OSCIA Soil Champion

Anne Loeffler's unique ability to encourage adoption of on-farm water quality improvement practices in the Grand River watershed has made her the 2020 Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) Soil Champion.

The award, which recognizes leaders in sustainable soil management, was presented at the OSCIA annual conference on Tuesday, February 4, 2020.

"The region has a large diversity of farmers and farms with different levels of technology and Anne has been particularly effective at working with all of them to find solutions to water quality challenges that they can accept and implement successfully," says OSCIA President Stuart Wright. "We're proud to recognize her commitment to conservation, soil and water quality with the Soil Champion award."

Over 20 years ago, the Region of Waterloo, farm organizations, Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), OSCIA and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) collaborated to develop the Rural Water Quality Program.

The voluntary program, funded by the Region, provides technical and financial assistance to farmers to improve and protect water quality in the watershed, where half a million people draw their drinking water from river sources. Similar programs now operate in Dufferin, Wellington, Brant, Oxford and Haldimand counties.

As a conservation specialist with GRCA since 1997, Ms. Loeffler's main role has been to help farmers plan projects and prepare cost-share applications and promote the importance of soil conservation and water quality.

It isn't always easy to convince landowners to change long-held practices, but Ms. Loeffler believes strongly in helping producers realize that soil conservation is worth the effort as a long term investment with benefit to the farm. The most impactful change she's seen related to environmental stewardship over the years has been the building of understanding and trust between the farming community and downstream water users.

"The producer wants the soil and nutrients to stay on their land and the municipality wants exactly the same thing, so we can make this kind of win-win happen," she says.

OSCIA is a not-for-profit farming organization whose mission is to facilitate responsible economic management of soil, water, air and crops through development and communication of innovative farming practices.