



Dean and Catherine Manning 2010 Winners of the Environmental Farm Stewardship Award

In the early 1980s when Dean Manning was helping his father Malcolm clear land for what would be their family farm, they left some of the woodlands untouched. The conventional thinking at that time was to clear all arable land, but the Mannings wanted to leave some natural habitat. Today, those woodlands are valuable shelterbelts, protecting pastures and croplands and providing habitat for wildlife as well as winter pasturage for the farm's beef cattle.

“We need to be good neighbours as well as good farmers,” Dean Manning says. He and his wife Catherine operate a mixed operation in Falmouth, not far from the town of Windsor, in Hants County. Along with a 100-head cow-calf beef herd, the Mannings grow grains, a variety of greenhouse crops, bedding plants, and other vegetables, most of which they sell directly through their seasonal on-site farm market. Their commitment to being good farmers and good neighbours has led to their being finalists for the second year running and the 2010 winner of the Farm Environmental Stewardship Award.



With housing developments popping up all around them, and a popular golf course bordering their lands, the Mannings are careful stewards of their 500 acres of farmland. Dean matches each part of his acreage with its best usage. The better land is used to produce corn silage, grain and forage crops, while lower-quality land is pasture and grazing land for the cattle. Areas that produce vegetable crops during the growing months are seeded down with winter rye each autumn to return nutrients to the soil and help prevent erosion control. The various watercourses that cross his lands are fenced out so the cattle can't get into them, and protected with a buffer area where wildlife flourishes.

Dean believes that soil and land management are the keys to good farm productivity. Most of his fields include rolling hills and dykeland along the river. He has his soil tested every couple of years, and uses cover crops and livestock manure instead of expensive manufactured fertilizers to maintain soil fertility. Manure is composted with hay and straw in an open pit, which reduces smell while stabilizing liquids and nutrients, then applied to fields used for corn, grain and forage crops. Raising pasture-grown beef cattle is a practical use of less-

productive cropland, and requires less in the way of costly inputs such as fertilizers for the soil and grain for the animals, and produces an excellent finished product.

While the Manning farm is not totally organic, Dean and Catherine use ecologically sound practices in everything they do. Greenhouse crops, including eggplant, salad greens, peppers, tomatoes and English cucumbers, are grown in steam-pasteurized beds composed of peat, straw, and composted manure. When and if crops need spraying, the treatments are timed to ensure they will be most effective and are applied at minimal levels using best management practices. The greenhouse crops are managed using biological control methods to deal with pests.

Catherine Manning says operating the on-farm market and participating in the Environmental Farm Plan program have been beneficial for their operation in several ways. “We welcome customers on our farm, where they can see first-hand how we do things,” she says. “They come away with a better understanding of how much work we dedicate to being good farmers and land stewards. They also gain the benefits of high quality local produce, which they love.” Dean and Catherine’s children are very involved with the farm too. Son Andrew, 10, shadows his father when not in school, and has every intention of following in his dad’s footsteps when he gets older. Daughter Caylene, 12, helps out with the greenhouse work and is very active in 4-H.



Manning strongly believes in the importance of Environmental Farm Plans for any producer, regardless of what they farm or how large or small their operations may be. “From a stewardship point of view, we need to look after our lands and waters so they’ll be in good shape for future generations,” he says. “From a management point of view, it’s an investment in our own futures as producers. We have to be good land managers in order to be good farmers.”

The Farm Environmental Stewardship Award is a part of the Environmental Farm Plan Program. It was created through a partnership of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the NS Environmental Farm Plan Team and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture. The Environmental Farm Plan Program is an initiative under the Canada-Nova Scotia Growing Forward Agreement.