

The Oulton Family

2010 Farm Environmental Stewardship Finalist



People driving through the Martock area of Hants County often slow down when they are about to pass the Oulton family farm. The farm sits on the crest of a hill, with rolling pastures, orchard, and woodland all around the property. Near the road, a huge pond is usually teeming with waterfowl—ducks, wild and domestic geese, and other birds—while the pastures have horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, and other domesticated livestock browsing on the lush forage. A sign at the end of the long sweeping driveway announces “Mike Oulton Quality Meats”, and invites those passersby to come in for a visit.



The Oulton family has been farming this land for four generations, and all of the current members of the farm—Mike and Dianne, son Wayne and wife Nicole, and son Victor and wife Novadawn—take pride in their dedication to using sustainable agricultural and environmental practices in all aspects of the operation. The farm includes mixed livestock, orchards, woodlots, and two abattoirs. They farm beef cattle, sheep, free-range turkeys and chickens, other poultry including quail and partridge, several types of deer and elk, and other exotic animal species including emu and yak. The farm provides employment for 16 full-time and 10 seasonal workers.

“We consider the environment in all our business decisions,” says Wayne Oulton. Whether they’re pasturing a new type of livestock or considering how to best store fuel on the farm, they research all projects to make sure they’re up to date with new technologies. The family works constantly to make the farm greener with less labour input, and have improved working conditions for everyone on the farm by their dedication.

In keeping with their commitment to sustainability on the farm, the Oultons recently requested a review of their Environmental Farm Plan and are working on the improvements suggested in the review. In recent years, the family has reduced the amount of fertilizer needed in their orchards, which is under an integrated pest management program, by doing yearly soil and leaf analyses, and using more organics from their livestock operation to nurture the soils. All ponds on the property are fenced to reduce erosion from livestock, which are now watered by wells placed around the pasturage.

Much of the land farmed by the Oultons is on the dykes around the tidal river, and has been land-formed to improve efficiency for cropping and harvesting. The family works cooperatively with the Canadian Wildlife service, participating in the wild duck-banding program every winter for the past three years.

The provincially inspected abattoir and poultry processing plant on the farm both require a lot of handling of wastewater. The Oultons created a wastewater wetland consisting of four gravity-fed ponds full of water-filtering vegetation such as cattails and alders. This wetland also handles the runoff from the manure lagoon and compost piles, and has been very effective at filtering impurities from the wastewater.

When you have an abattoir and meat processing facility, naturally there will be offal to deal with. The Oultons worked with the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture to develop a compost pilot project, and have been successful in composting farm waste and offal. Not only has this composting project reduced the expense of handling the byproducts; it creates an excellent soil amendment and fertilizer for use on the farmlands.

The Oultons' 800-acre silvacultured woodlot is selectively managed with a plan developed by the Department of Natural Resources. Family members tend to all aspects of tending the woodlot, and timber harvested is used in an industrial-sized outdoor wood furnace that heats all of the farm's buildings as well as the family's homes.

With a thriving farm market and butcher shop on the property, the Oulton family welcomes visitors to their farm daily. Mike believes this is a vital way to educate others about agriculture. "Having the public learn and understand agriculture and agricultural practices is a vital step to the 'buy local' initiative, and helps more people to value and maintain rural communities," he says.

Wayne agrees with his father's vision. "It's important for producers to get involved with an Environmental Farm Plan because it shows others that we care about the environment and look after it," he says. "We want as many people to come here as possible so they understand our passion for farming and for producing good, healthy foods." He looks forward to the day the 5th generation of Oultons— his and Nicole's 3 children Josee, Ty and Chet and Wyatt, son of Victor and Novadawn—take their place in the farm's operation.

The Oulton family's dedication to good environmental stewardship has resulted in them being named as finalists for the Farm Environmental Stewardship award. The 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.