

## John & Cecilia Waalderbos



### 2010 Farm Environmental Stewardship Finalist

If you're driving between Pugwash and Amherst on the Sunrise Trail, you can't help but notice Viking Crest Farm Ltd. The 100-cow dairy operation owned by John and Cecilia Waalderbos is heralded by a sparkling red and white barn, gaily decorated with a painting of a Holstein cow wearing a Viking helmet and flanked by Dutch and Canadian flags. The flags celebrate the farm's heritage as well as its future. John and Cecilia moved to Canada from the Netherlands in the early 1980s, and established their farm in Shinimicas several years after immigrating.

"Coming from Europe, where there were already strict environmental rules surrounding agriculture, it was natural for us to develop our operation with environmental considerations in mind," John says. "It's just good sense to look after the land and the environment, and leave it in as good or better shape for the next generation to use."



Viking Crest Farm has a rolling landscape, and includes two natural waterways that feed into the Shinimicas River. The farm's waterways are all fenced off from the animals, which are watered on pasture with tubs fed with underground water lines. This keeps dirt and manure out of the waterways as well as eliminates any erosion by livestock movement. More than 75 % of the farm has been tile drained, and there are many ditches that direct runoff from the drainage. These practices allow fields to dry more readily after winter or after heavy rainfalls. The benefits to such practices include being able to work the land earlier in the spring and have a longer cropping season, while reducing the risk of damage to the soil by working it with heavy machineries when it is still wet.

The dairy barn is a scene of truly "contented cows". The cows are milked using computerized robot milkers, which allow the animals to be milked as often as they want up to every six hours while not over-milking or stressing the udders. The dairy holding area uses a plate cooler to cool the milk, which provides two significant environmental and economic benefits. The plate cooler uses water rather than electricity to cool the milk down to its proper storing temperature, and the warmed water from the cooler is recycled for the cows, which readily drink water that isn't too cold. Cows due to calve are stabled on special "waterbed" type pads that provide them with comfortable resting under their feet, while young calves are housed in spacious pens until they are ready to be weaned off milk and onto other feeds.

The Waalderbos family was an early adopter of both the Nutrient Management Plan and the Environmental Farm Plan. John says they have always put heavy emphasis on nutrient management, having worked with consultant Lise LeBlanc for nearly two decades. Soils are

tested frequently to monitor for nutrient composition. There are two manure storage systems at Viking Crest. The main barn houses the milking cows, and has a slatted floor through which manure falls into a pit under the barn. Young stock is housed in a separate barn, which has a walled manure storage slab. Manure is spread in the spring or fall when the ground isn't frozen, with the applicators staying a safe distance from the waterways.

John and Cecilia apply fertilizers using GPS technology for maximizing accuracy of application while minimizing the amount of time spent on the land using heavy machinery. Newly seeded grass fields for hay or pasturage are underseeded with peas and oats, which effectively choke out many weeds and reduce the need for herbicides. GPS technology is also used in herbicide application, which is only done on fields being used for corn silage production.

In 2007, John and Cecilia constructed a wetland that had been designed by Ducks Unlimited to handle wastewater and barn runoff. This wetland consists of a series of three lagoons and surrounding vegetation that filters and clean outs wastes. The family mows their fields using a 'centre-pivot' mower that lets them mow from one side of the field across to the other, allowing wildlife to escape from the path of the equipment.

The Waalderbos family includes daughters Kim, who one day plans to operate the farm, Jodie, an elementary school teacher, and Kristy, a welding inspector in Saint John. They are always happy to open their barns and fields to tours by fellow farmers and other visitors, as a way of encouraging others about the benefits of farming with the environment in mind. "We hope we're educating by example," says Cecilia. "Our job is to look after our animals and our lands in the best way we can, because everything we do is to help feed people. Our productivity, our healthy animals and ecosystems back up our dedication."

It is this absolute dedication to good farm stewardship that has resulted in Viking Crest Farm being one of the finalists in the Farm Environmental Stewardship Award. The award is a part of the Environmental Farm Plan Program, 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.