



Wheatley River Improvement Group

January, 2010

Rackam's Pond: Before, After & Next

Given what they say about pictures, here are a couple of thousand words:



Before: Stream choked by sediment

Phase 1 of the Rackham's Pond project has been successfully completed. It's our hope that the story told by these eloquent images will encourage residents and visitors to drop by the pond (3 minute walk up the road from Wheatley River Hall) and have a look at the progress that has been accomplished so far. WRIG considers this year's work as the first step in a three-phase project to enhance the wetland and provide recreational and educational opportunities for the community.

Thanks to Tracy Gallant and Rob Reddin, several school groups were able to use the pond as a destination for a field learning event in October, something we hope to continue next season.



After: Rackham's Pond liberated

Next

We expect Phase 2 to start early in the spring of 2010. This will involve further work on the Rackham's Pond Interpretive Trail bordering the wetland. The trail will include signage to highlight the natural and historical features of the wetland and to demonstrate the abundance of animal and plant species that are found there. Other work will include tree planting, re-seeding of native plants, installation of bird nest boxes and further pond excavation. Dam enhancements are planned as well. Thanks to the Cymbria Lion's Club we will be building and installing a fully accessible fishing platform. Other features include picnic tables and benches to encourage recreational use of the area.

Special thanks to MLA Carolyn Bertram who believed in our vision for the pond project and who championed our fund raising activity.

Wayne Gairns

Les Grandes Visites



Ministers Brown and Bertram join WRIGers at the pond



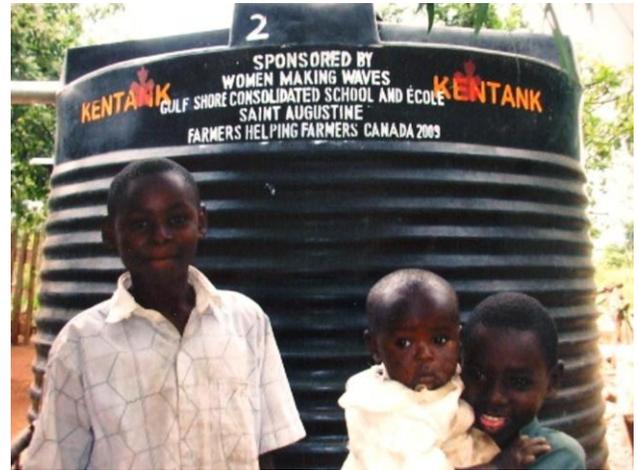
MP Wayne Easter drops by



One of the school groups to visit the pond

Walking for Water

The image below shows three beautiful children - all of whom are now benefiting from our watershed's first "Walk for Water" - a shared event held last March in recognition of the United Nations World Water Day.



Behind these children stands one of the two water collection tanks that the Wheatley River Improvement Group (WRIG) & the Hunter/Clyde Watershed Group, along with the children of the schools in our watersheds, were able to provide to two African villages through Farmers Helping Farmers! Our neighboring watershed groups are so proud to have facilitated this combined fundraiser and educational event. With the support of the wonderful staff of Gulf Shore School and L'ecole Saint-Augustine we were able to bring awareness to both the condition of our compromised local Island water quality and the crisis in global water quality and quantity.

The result of our first Walk for Water is that two entire villages will see increased health and prosperity, that the women and children of these villages will no longer spend a huge portion of their day in search of safe water but instead, these children will be able to spend time in school. It may be fair to say that through this event, the children of our two watersheds learned valuable ecological lessons and then, in turn, became teaches as they collected their pledges. The message they brought to their families and communities was that no-one, in our watersheds, in our province or in our country should ever take our water for granted and that we all should work to conserve and protect the water we share.

Congratulations to everyone who contributed and helped to set in motion, unbelievable changes in the lives of children and their families in two villages half a world away. Lets do it again!

Tracy Gallant

Three Farm: Three Approaches to Balancing Consumer Demand and Sustainability

It used to be, when the merits of organic versus conventional food were discussed, you might hear something like, “well, organic food may be better for the environment, but consumers want perfectly shaped, unblemished fruits and vegetables and you can’t get those by farming organically”. It’s not clear whether or not the latter part of that statement was ever true; but certainly organic production has advanced to the point that most people would not be able to tell an organic cabbage from a non-organic cabbage. No longer do consumers need to decide between food that is produced in a way that is good for the environment (and looks really bad) and food that looks perfect (and may have been produced at a cost to the environment). What hasn’t changed, perhaps, is the role of consumer demand in determining what farmers will produce, and how.

Farmers in the Wheatley River watershed, like farmers in other parts of the province and country, are facing huge challenges. Rising costs of production, and competition with foreign imports are some of the factors that have forced good farmers to give up, after years and even generations of making a living in agriculture.

Over the past five years, the costs of inputs (fertilizer, pesticides, fuel, etc) for conventional agriculture have increased drastically, causing some farmers to look at organic production with renewed interest. **Eddie Dykerman of Brookfield Gardens** is one of them. In 2009, after three years of planning and experimenting, he planted 10 acres in organic carrots, and landed a deal with Sobey’s to supply 200,000 pounds of carrots.

The decision to start with carrots was based on experiments Brookfield had done with fertilizer levels a few years ago. They found that they could reduce the amount of Nitrogen applied to carrots at the time of planting by 75% and still get the same yield. At the same time, they developed a machine to cut back carrot leaves to increase air circulation and reduce the need for fungicides. The farm has also experimented with cover crops, mechanical weeding and trap crops (plants like collards that when planted around a cabbage field will attract cabbage moths), measures which could reduce inputs of chemicals that may be harmful to the environment.

For Eddie, who says he has no opinion about organic vs conventional agriculture, his foray into organic agriculture is strictly a marketing decision, an effort to supply “what the customer wants”. It appears that customers do, in fact,

want more organically-produced and local farm products. More and more space is taken up with organic produce, grains and even processed foods in our major supermarkets, and farmers’ markets in Summerside and Charlottetown as well as other Island communities are doing a thriving business.

You have to be at the Charlottetown Farmer’s Market early on a Saturday morning if you want to put some of **David and Edith Ling’s** hamburgers on the grill in time for supper. Their booth is a popular spot, one of few places to purchase organically produced beef on the Island. Their farm in North Winsloe includes a herd of between 55 and 60 beef cattle and 125 acres under cultivation. They grow their own grain and hay to feed their cattle.

The Lings treat their soil with great care, waiting in the spring until it dries somewhat before cultivation in order to reduce compaction and help control weeds. No chemical sprays or artificial fertilizers are used on the farm. Instead, their own composted manure is applied in the fall and worked into the ground to be ready for spring. Their fields all have a cover crop for winter in an effort to reduce wind and water erosion.

Their animals (they produce some pork as well) do not receive antibiotics or artificial growth hormones. Because it is a relatively small farm, it is possible to keep a close eye on the health of the livestock and catch any problem early. Customers say there is definitely a difference in the flavour of the beef - it is tender and tasty and they like the fact it is drug-free and that the cattle are not fed feed which has been sprayed by herbicides.

Organic farming, like other types of farming, is challenging. Farm expenses continue to rise sharply and prices charged by farmers for food cannot keep pace. And as Edith points out, organic farming is much more labour intensive. As is the case with conventionally-produced food, once the food gets on the supermarket shelves, there is a tremendous mark-up on it, yet the farmer does not reap the increased benefits.

Edith notes that, as larger operations get into organic production, it is good to have more organic food available, but she feels this is a type of production more suitable to smaller producers. She says, “Farm families are a very important part of the fabric of rural P.E.I. and they need to be encouraged and supported by all means possible. We need to have many rural farm families in our communities and not have the farming done by a few large-scale operations.”

Just down the road from Edith and David, **Soleil Hutchinson** has a small farm, also in the Wheatley River

watershed. She also has found a way to meet consumer demand for good-quality, local food. Soleil farms a large variety of mostly heirloom varieties of vegetables and specialty greens, which she sells almost exclusively to local restaurants. She works with chefs who are interested in preparing dishes with new, or uncommon vegetables, for tourists and local customers who are looking for something local, flavourful, and maybe a bit different. Soleil's is a non-traditional farm; in the first place, she has just over an acre in production (but hopes to triple that next year), and she rents the land. She has started small, making a deliberate decision to avoid large capital costs, hoping to grow her business in a progressive, sustainable fashion. As a former Coordinator of the Pisquid watershed group, Soleil is aware of the impact farming practices can have on the environment. She uses organic methods to grow her crops, which she feels has benefits both in preserving the environment and in meeting the needs of consumers.

Ann Wheatley

WRIG thanks ...

Karen Gallant for the beautiful logo you see pictured here which will soon to appear on the signage at Rackam's Pond,



and **P John Burden** for the original design

featured on each edition of our newsletter.

And thanks as well to our 2009 Corporate Sponsors:

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Thanks to **Sam Arnold, Brodie MacLeod and Iddo van der Geer** for all their hard work this past summer.



Sam building a brush mat



Brodie and Iddo (far right) with TREC Crew