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INSTITUT CANADIEN DES ENGRAIS



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4R Nutrient Stewardship Demonstration Farms Show Promising Results

New London, PEI (September 18, 2014) – The results of 4R demonstration farms on Prince Edward Island are proving that producers, consumers and the environment benefit when new practices, such as 4R Nutrient Stewardship, make sure nutrients are staying where they are placed. Today, a tour of these demonstrations allowed over 50 farmers, government officials and stakeholders the opportunity to see what the 4R program is achieving as they visited two potato demonstrations, a watershed nitrate initiative, a phosphorus saturation study and a panel discussion on sustainable land management.

The goal of the program is simple—helping to ensure producers apply fertilizer using the right source, right rate, right time and right place methodology. Gary Linkletter, a Summerside grower and chair of the PEI Potato Board, said that this program is good news for both the bottom line of producers and the environment. “Farmers respect and protect the land and water resources that are integral to their livelihoods – for the benefit of all Islanders. Now with more information and new research, we can fine tune our nutrient use to make even more of a difference.”

PEI was the first province to sign on to the program, which is spearheaded by the Canadian Fertilizer Institute. The Island partners include the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, PEI Federation of Agriculture, the PEI Potato Board and the Kensington North Watershed Association.

Two years ago, the program contracted Steve Watts of Genesis Crop Systems Inc. to conduct five demonstration trials on potato farms. This year, the trails have expanded to 13 demonstrations with plenty of interest from the farming community. The demonstration farms are intended to compare various 4R best management practices with practices currently popular among members of the PEI potato industry. Quad copters during the tour provided aerial footage of the 2014 4R demonstration sites. In the next year, the project has plans to utilize drones, which will provide high resolution aerial data to help examine performance in 4R demonstration crops to aid in better business decisions and sustainable farming practices. Watts highlighted that more research needs to be done on developing science-based techniques to reduce nutrients in groundwater, adding the 4R program is an important component. Results have been extremely encouraging from year 1 studies and preliminary test digs indicate that similar results are certainly possible for the 2014 evaluations. “All of the test fields to date have showed increased yields both in weight and quality after implementing 4R recommendations,” explains Watts. “Growers are taking a hard look at making adjustments to their current crop fertility programs.” Watts stresses the point that all changes are introduced on an incremental basis; most growers are naturally quite reluctant to make any large changes over a short period of time without seeing the proof at their own fields.

The project recognizes the need to reduce nitrate contamination in drinking water, especially on PEI, since it is the only province that is 100 per cent dependent on groundwater for drinking. Hunter Farms hosted one of the stops on the tour. “We have an opportunity here to increase farm profitability while remaining good stewards of our family’s land through the 4R program,” Kevin Hunter says. “By participating, we are able to assess each year what we’ve done and make incremental changes in our farming practices to ensure fertilizer is used more effectively.”

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