



Warren, his wife, Christine, and daughter, LiliAnne



Spreader mounted onto front of sprayer



Rye interseeded into corn—pre-harvest.



Strip-Tiller being loaded

# Warren Schneckenburger 2019

## Innovative Farmer of the Year

*by Melanie Epp*

Each year, the Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario chooses one farmer whose dedication to soil health, environmental stewardship and progressive production makes them stand out from the crowd. At this year's conference, Feb 20/21, 2019, Warren Schneckenburger will be awarded the Innovator of the Year Award for 2019.

Alongside his parents Arden and Rhonda Schneckenburger, Warren and his wife operate Cedar Lodge Farms, a cash crop farm with a small beef feedlot outside of Morrisburg. Schneckenburger is the third generation on the farm. His grandparents, Martin and Evelyn, purchased it in 1954 after emigrating from Germany. Today, the farm's main crops are corn, soybeans, winter wheat and edible beans.

Much has changed on the farm in the last 10 years. The moldboard plow, for instance, was the main fall tillage tool for 100 per cent of the corn and about half the soybeans.

In 2011, a pivotal trip to the National No-Till Conference in Cincinnati inspired a commitment to change. "A photo in a slideshow by Joel Gruver of strip-tilling into a lush green field of annual ryegrass set in motion a decade of change for our operation," said Schneckenburger. "And I'm certain it isn't over yet."

Following the conference, Schneckenburger made the decision to permanently park the plow, and began implementing more soil-friendly practices, such as improved rotation, strip tillage, controlled traffic farming (CTF) and cover crops. "A real effort to stop all tillage ahead of soybeans was made and building soil structure became a real goal for our farm," said Schneckenburger. Ultimately his 10 year goal is to be 100% no-till.

In 2012, Schneckenburger began experimenting with cover crops, devoting acres of land to research. Right now, he's intrigued with interseeding cereal rye into corn ahead of soybeans in fall. "It is an awesome feeling to have over 1,000 acres of cereal rye 'growing' in droughty conditions under corn stalks, and record acres of winter wheat for our farm," said Schneckenburger. "We are also already at 80 per cent of our corn ground strip tilled."

Today, Schneckenburger's primary focus is on soil health and compaction mitigation, not yield. But his efforts are being rewarded. "Tracks have become the major player on the farm. Most tillage, planting and harvest is now done on belts, some in controlled traffic, some not."

Schneckenburger believes that the biggest contributor to compaction on his farm is the sprayer, which is why it now runs on dedicated CTF trams to mitigate its impact. Where tracks can't be used, Schneckenburger employs VF tires.

"It is amazing how quickly the soils change, and from my mentors anecdotes I'm reasonably confident that within the 10-year timeline we'll maintain – if not increase – corn yields during the transition" Schneckenburger concluded.

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