



**Dr. Peter Kotzeff**



**Dr. Tim Boring**

## **Innovative Farmer of the Year — Peter Kotzeff**

Each year, the Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO) selects an Ontario farmer committed to soil health, environmental stewardship, and progressive thinking and this year's award goes to Dr. Peter Kotzeff.

Dr. Kotzeff is a veterinarian who owns and manages 2,200 acres in Bruce County. Half his farm acreage is cash crop, a quarter is dedicated to grazing and the remainder is protected woodland (of which, 150 acres is permanently fenced), wetland, and riverbanks. Eight kilometers of the Saugeen River meanders through his property and is fenced from livestock other than point source water crossings and two riparian grazed pastures. Much of his property is marginal land with irregular sloped fields.

Peter's objectives are to identify the best use of his land to keep soil on the land and believes it is his responsibility to integrate cattle grazing, minimal tillage, cover crops and sensible crop rotation to improve soil health and water quality.

To maximize usage of his land base while maintaining or improving his soil, Peter includes cattle in his operation to provide an income source from land that is not optimal for crop production. By planting overwintering cover crops that his cattle graze, Peter protects the hills that slope to the Saugeen River, reduces his winter cattle feed costs, and provides opportunities for his pastures to rest and recover.

Peter's 225 cows and bred heifers and 160 retained calves have access to alternate watering sources and a late season diet of stockpiled forage, grazing corn, red clover, volunteer wheat cover crop, corn stalk, and a cover crop mix of wheat, peas and turnips. In addition, he supplements the standing corn forage with aerially seeded rye at the V6 stage. Depending on the winter, the cattle are still out on the land in January. As long as the snow is not frozen or too crusty, he allows his cattle to graze through snow. Peter calculates savings of \$50,000 in winter-feed costs by grazing cover crop/corn stubble through mid January (\$3/day cows and \$1/day calves). Not including the one-time cost of installing a fence.

By leaving marginal lands natural, incorporating livestock and utilizing soil health principles, Dr. Kotzeff has observed improved soil structure, greater nutrient availability, and a healthier river.

***IFAO has decided to formally recognize the expansive value of learning from farmers beyond our borders, by adding an Innovative Farmer of the Year — Honourable Mention, for the first time being awarded to Tim Boring of Michigan.***

**Tim Boring**

**Innovative Farmer of the Year — Honourable Mention**

Tim Boring has a PhD in Crop and Soil Sciences and is a 6th generation farmer on his Michigan family raising a variety of grain crops. In 2012, Tim took over management of the family farm, implementing practices aimed at increasing the long-term productivity and profitability of the farm. Refining fertilizer rates, cutting seed costs, and dedicated integrated pest management all offered incremental gains, but Tim soon saw that none of these practices would result in dramatic improvements. His initial implementation of soil health practices, including transitioning to strip-till and using cover crops, were driven directly by the pursuit of long-term economic gains. This approach led to including wheat in the rotation, relay cropping soybeans into wheat, strip-cropping, 60 inch corn, interseeding cover crops, adoption of pure no-till and planting green.

On his journey, Tim has benefited greatly from the inclusive community of innovative growers, in the US, Canada, and around the world, that share experiences and ideas. In that spirit of sharing, Tim has served with many agricultural state and national organizations and founded Michigan Agricultural Advancement, an organization working to improve the economic and environmental state of agriculture. What began as an economically driven approach evolved into a soil health regenerative ag philosophy, with healthy farm economics still at its core.

Tim is now focused on diversifying farm economic models, as one more step in the process. He sees expanding beyond conventional grain production to specialty grains grown under contract, and high value direct to market crops, as having the potential to not only enable better implementation of regenerative ag principles, but perhaps more importantly, offer a better economic model for small and medium grain farms moving forward.