

The Carbon Footprint Initiative



Business and municipal leaders such as (left to right) Phil Beard of the Maitland Valley Conservation Area, Kriss Snell of the Municipality of North Perth, and Richard Kees0 of J.H. Keeso and Sons Ltd., are making strides in their mission to combat their carbon output. By forming the Carbon Footprint Initiative, local leaders are tracking their carbon footprint, making changes at their businesses to reduce carbon output, and planting thousands of trees to make up the balance. Next...they hope to share their CFI strategies to encourage more companies and government divisions to join their alliance.

Idling transport trucks are being turned off. Gas-guzzling pick-ups are being replaced with electric cars. And thousands of trees are being planted as several local businessmen in the seed, insurance and agri-business fields, along with municipal leaders and conservation authority staff, are committing themselves to sustainability for future generations.

“We’re all seeing more extremes in weather around the world with floods, tornadoes and hurricanes; the melting of the ice caps. It’s all part of what I see to be global warming and climate change,” says Ron Coghlin, chairman of Molesworth Farm Supply Ltd. “When I think about the

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switching to
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strategy

Photo and Stories by Lisa B. Pot

implications of that for my kids and grandkids, that makes me want to be part of the solution for sustainability.”

That solution is a non-profit action group called the Carbon Footprint Initiative (CFI). It’s an alliance of community and business leaders including Coghlin; Deb Shewfelt, Chair of the Maitland Valley Conservation Area (MVCA); Kriss Snell, CAO for the Municipality of North Perth; Richard Keeso, President of J.H. Keeso and Sons Ltd.; Joe Dietrich, CEO of Trillium Mutual Insurance; Tim MacDonald, CEO of Ideal Supply Co. Ltd.; Chet Calhoun, with Dupont Pioneer, Wingham Parent Seed Plant and Phil Beard, MVCA General Manager, Secretary/Treasurer.

CFI members are dedicated to developing ways to reduce their carbon footprint and subsequent use of fossil fuels. As they develop carbon footprint strategies, they plan to share what they learn and plant trees to counterattack climate change.

“Our purpose is to reduce our own carbon footprints. Then to get more members to use our non-profit group as a stepping stone to lower their carbon emissions and help future generations live in a sustainable environment,” explains Coghlin.

It begins with driving to their own businesses. When Coghlin and his team conducted their own carbon footprint research, he learned the feedmill and its 20 large trucks emit over 2,000 metric tonnes of carbon each year. “That’s a sizable amount and we’re just a small business when you think of agribusinesses with fleets of 800 to 1,000 trucks,” says Coghlin. “We decided to do something about it.”

Knowing that trees are the best option to sequester carbon out of the atmosphere, they committed to donating \$5,000 to the MCVA for tree planting.

Then it was time to look at the trucks themselves. Since transportation is necessary for the business, eliminating the use of fossil fuels isn’t an option. So Coghlin had to find ways to reduce emissions and that started with a simple no-idling policy. GPS systems were installed in all vehicles to monitor the driver’s

speed, idling time and fuel consumption. The business already had a six-year replacement policy on trucks and this was expanded to search out the most fuel-efficient trucks available on the market. In terms of smaller vehicles, gas-powered vehicles are being replaced with diesel and the plan is to replace three pick-ups with three electric cars starting next year.

Moreover, Molesworth Feed Supply holds quarterly meetings with drivers and staff to learn about fuel-saving techniques such as progressive shifting on larger trucks. Coghlin says uptake has been tremendous with his own son eager to trade in his pickup for one of the electric cars (Chevy Volts).

Coghlin isn’t the only keen and decisive member on the CFI eager to transition away from using fossil fuels. With the objective to measure and reduce their carbon footprint and compensate for carbon usage by planting trees, Richard Keeso of J.H. Keeso and Sons Ltd is fully on board. Although he cuts down trees for a living, he has a deep respect for forests and sustainability and being proactive in the face of adverse effects of climate change.

“In our business, we consider ourselves environmentalists,” says Keeso, speaking from a plantation of hardwood trees on the east side of Listowel Memorial Park. He walks through, checking the trees with Phil Beard and Kriss Snell of the Municipality of North Perth where much of the tree planting is taking place.



“When I think about the implications of climate change for my kids and grandkids, I want to be part of the solution for sustainability”
~Ron Coghlin



The leadership team committed to the Carbon Footprint Initiative consists of (back row, left to right): Chet Calhoun, Productivity Coordinator, Wingham Parent Plant, Pioneer/Dupont; Kriss Snell, CAO, North Perth; Phil Beard, GM/ST, MVCA; Ron Coghlin, Molesworth Farm Supply; Richard Keeso, J.H. Keeso and Son; Art Versteeg, Chair, MVCA and (front row, left to right): Joe Dietrich, CEO, Trillium Mutual; Deb Shewfelt, chair, MVCA along with Julie Behrms, Mayor, North Perth.

Keeso is a long-time proponent of silviculture prescriptions, which involves strategic cutting to allow for forest regeneration by encouraging second growth. “Science has taught us how we can emulate nature,” says Keeso who has researched climate change throughout the years. He defines himself as a conservationist so joining the CFI was a natural extension of work he’d already committed too. Two years ago he purchased a chip-burning broiler to heat his mill with its own fuel (woodchips) to replace natural gas usage.

When measuring his own carbon footprint as part of the CFI, he learned he’d need to plant 343 trees to compensate for Keeso’s carbon usage. His goal is to plant along the Middle Maitland river to control runoff, cool and shade the water, and create habitat along the challenged portions of the river. Like Molesworth Feed Supply, a no-idling policy has been instituted and GPS units have been installed in equipment to monitor fuel usage.

“We are committed to this in the long term and hope other businesses will get excited about what we are doing and want to join the CFI,” says Keeso.

Snell believes momentum is building for individuals and businesses to be environmentally proactive. When environmental protection is combined with economic benefit, it’s a no-brainer.

And it’s happening in North Perth in terms of cost and time-savings. The municipality has also installed GPS units in their fleet of vehicles, which includes snowplows, tandem trucks and pickup trucks.

“Our carbon footprint can be quite significant when you consider how much fuel we burn during a bad winter season,” admits Snell. However, keeping driving speeds less than 90 km per hour significantly reduces fuel consumption. The municipality also replaced all older lighting systems with LED in a \$600,000 outlay that has significant hydro savings and a payback of 11 years.

Some of the change involves looking at ingrained habits and asking “do we still need to do that?” For instance, there’s an unused acreage in Gowanstown that the municipality maintains by cutting grass once a week. Rather than use fossil fuels to mow, the municipality has decided to naturalize the property and is now looking at other areas where they can do the same.

“Most municipalities have an abundance of parkland which is maintained because it was always maintained. It was the preferred appearance; a cultural thing to have large open areas of cut grass,” says Snell. Naturalizing is the new way although when it was introduced at Listowel Memorial Park there was opposition. “It takes education to explain why naturalizing is a cost-

saving and beneficial approach,” explains Snell.

It’s a process that won’t happen overnight but it needs to start now, says Deb Shewfelt, former mayor of Goderich and the current chair of the MVCA. “We used to be able to drink out of our creeks...let’s see if we can create more grass scapes and tree plantings so we can do that again,” he says.

The main business in this part of the province is agriculture which relies on good soil and water. To keep our industries thriving, it’s imperative we protect the watershed, believes Shewfelt. Knowing your carbon footprint doesn’t just make you an environmentalist, it makes you a successful businessman.

Figuring out the carbon footprint for a business is fairly easy these days since all the science and economic factors are out there to determine CO2 emissions. One formula can be found on the Natural Resources Canada website. However, climate change itself is not well understood in this part of Ontario, he believes.

“We (MVCA) really wanted community leaders that are respected in their sectors to come on board to extend the reach of CFI,” says Beard. “It brings profile to this issue in a way we cannot. As these respected leaders talk about their involvement, people will sit up and take notice and that will lead to action.”

Climate change has resulted from



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~Kriss Snell

the burning of fossil fuels which is causing a greenhouse effect by trapping the sun's heat closer to the planet. The result is "weird weather" and the MVCA reports that we can expect drier and hotter summers with more intense winds and precipitation in the spring and fall. Shorter, more intense thunderstorms will increase potential for flash floods, soil and erosion and damage to infrastructure. More snowsqualls can be expected and fewer winter days below freezing may also mean more frequent freeze-thaw cycles leading to ice storms and winter flooding.

At MVCA, the strategy is to reduce their carbon footprint by 7,000 litres of fossil fuel by the year 2020. That will begin in 2017 with the replacement of three gas-powered vehicles with electric vehicles. "We haven't been able to do that until now because we needed a vehicle that could reliably reach 250 km to a charge. The technology is now here and that's important. Because we don't want to purchase a novelty – we want it to fulfill its function. Otherwise the switch is not credible," says Beard.

He admits it's easier for the MCVA to make sweeping changes than for a company like Ideal Supply, which has a large fleet and uses significant litres of fuel. "Quite a few trees would need to be planted to compensate for that." There are realities to business and profitability that need to be recognized. Questions such as "why should I tackle this when my competitors are not?" were asked. However, all the CFI alliance members hold the belief that measuring and compensating for their carbon footprint is the right thing to do.

"Morally, they believe in this. And that's the biggest driving factor," says Beard.

He has no doubt the movement will grow and while it could create a lot of work for the MVCA, it's a situation he'd love to see. Yet he's realistic in realizing that there are still many people and businesses that don't see climate change as an issue and it may take decades before everyone is on board to reduce their carbon footprint.

For now, the team is excited by two community projects: the



A no-idling policy has been put in place at Molesworth Farm Supply Ltd., as part of their Carbon Footprint Strategy which Jan Morris, HSE-HACCP coordinator, played a role in.

Listowel Memorial Park Rehabilitation Project and the Middle Maitland Headwaters Restoration Project. Both aim to improve the health of the river which involves restoring approximately 300 acres of floodplain and river valley lands as natural buffers along the Middle

Maitland River from Listowel upstream to its headwaters located in Mapleton.

"I think it's important that we leave our communities in a better state than when we inherited them," concludes Snell. "We have neglected our environment too long and it's time we turn as many areas as we can back to nature in a way that does not affect the overall economy."

Coghlin agrees. He's already spoken with two

other feed mill owners about the project. He stresses this alliance is non-profit with no ulterior motive. "This is a really responsible committee with no motivation other than to create sustainability in our environment," he says. ♦

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