STAFFING CHANGES AT OMAFRA

On September 14, 2000 John Johnston retired from OMAFRA. As most of you know, prior to his eight years at the Appeal Tribunal, he also held several different roles in drainage, including the position of Drainage Coordinator, which I now hold. John has always been a valuable source of information for me, as well as for many of you. John has accepted a position with the Ontario Milk Transport Association as their General Manager. He also accepted the position of Executive Secretary/Treasurer with the Land Improvement Contractors of Ontario, so if you attend the LICO/DSAO convention in London on January 24 & 25, 2001, you will see him again. Sue Gillespie has been hired to fill John's former position at the Tribunal Office.

Mike Toombs was the Manager of Agricultural Land Use, responsible for, among other things, the Drainage Programs. Many of you have met Mike at last year's Engineers Conference, at the LICO/DSAO Convention and at the Drainage Program Review Consultations. Mike has accepted a one year secondment as Director of Client Services and his position has been filled, again for a one year term, by David Cooper, formerly from the Ministry of Natural Resources.

CONSULTATIONS ON INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

Consultations were held in January and February, 2000 in several locations across southern Ontario, as well as at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association/Ontario Good Roads Association annual conference in Toronto. The consultations were a response to ongoing concerns about the effects of intensive agricultural operations on rural Ontario. They were also conducted to obtain public input regarding the government's role relative to changing agricultural practices. The objective was to develop options that meet both the productivity and environmental needs of the agriculture sector and rural residents. A consultation summary report was released in July.

The government is now proposing legislation that would regulate agricultural operations. The government will consult on this proposal over the summer to develop the most comprehensive bill of its kind in the country for introduction this fall. The legislation would take the best practices that many farmers are already using and turn them into standards for all agricultural operations in Ontario. The proposed legislation may include:

- Defining categories for types of farms including livestock operations
- Developing standards according to the size of farms for agricultural practices including manure handling, storage and application
- Providing strict enforcement authority
- Setting out penalties and fines for infractions
WATER RESOURCE ISSUES

The government of Ontario continues to attempt to respond to the water issues of the day. In 1998 and 1999, the focus was on the lack of water resources. In 2000, the focus was on flood damages and water quality.

To respond to these issues, a Water Directors Committee has been formed with representatives from the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In June, a number of stakeholder groups were asked to attend meetings that were hosted by various Parliamentary Assistants and were conducted across the province. The purpose of these meetings was to gather information and opinions for the purpose of establishing a provincial water management framework. Work is continuing on this initiative, and while the focus appears to be on water and environmental protection, OMAFRA is pushing for responsible use of water resources.

The Environmental Commissioner issued a preliminary report in June that identified a number of deficiencies such as groundwater protection and nutrient management. The Drainage Act and agricultural tile drainage were specifically mentioned in this report. This may also have an impact on future drainage activity.

ONTARIO SMALL TOWN AND RURAL (OSTAR) DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Through SuperBuild, the Ontario Government is investing in priority infrastructure such as water, wastewater and flood control management facilities to ensure that Ontario's citizens continue to enjoy drinking water that is safe and reliable. In the 2000 Ontario Budget, the government announced three new infrastructure initiatives to build for the province's future. These infrastructure initiatives are:

1. $1 billion SuperBuild Millennium Partnerships Initiative
2. $300 million Sports Culture and Tourism Initiative
3. $600 million Ontario Small Town and Rural Development Initiative (OSTAR) (for infrastructure and economic development)

In the first OSTAR funding round, the government's top priority will be investing in projects that address public health and safety. All upper and lower tier municipalities in Ontario may apply, except for Toronto, Hamilton, Waterloo, Ottawa, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, London, Windsor and the Region of Niagara. These large urban areas will be eligible for SuperBuild's Millennium Partnerships initiative.

Proposals must focus on investments that improve economic development and quality of life with a focus on health and safety priorities. Examples may include: water and sewage, municipal bridges, municipal dams and storm sewers and roads, bridges and ferries. More information is available on the “Superbuild” website at www.superbuild.gov.on.ca/


**LAND INFORMATION ONTARIO (LIO)**

There is an exciting new project launched by the Government of Ontario called “Land Information Ontario” (LIO). The purpose of LIO is to orchestrate the collection and management of land information in the Province of Ontario. Land information includes:

- Property boundaries, and boundaries of cities and towns;
- Zoning, land-use, assessments and mining rights information;
- Population information (e.g. demographics and census data);
- Topographic features (e.g. elevation, contours, streams, etc.);
- Information about water, soils, plants, trees, air quality, fish and wildlife;
- Roads, civic addressing data and structures such as utilities and buildings.

In recent years Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology has progressed to the point that it can now be integrated with conventional information systems to provide an increasing variety of business solutions. The key to harnessing this new information gathering and processing ability is the creation of a common infrastructure which will allow a wide range of consistent and well-managed land information to be captured, cataloged and made readily available. With an effective information infrastructure in place, business and government in Ontario will be in a position to improve productivity, planning, decision making and effective use of resources.

As a component of LIO, OMAFRA has formed a new “Geomatics Service Centre” and has hired Dave Bray and Bryce Matthews to begin work on this. Their primary responsibilities will be to develop and maintain the soils, constructed drains and tile drainage layers for the LIO project. It is OMAFRA’s intention to work with municipalities in the updating and maintenance of Constructed Drain information. Some municipalities and Drainage Engineers are using a CAD or GIS to update and maintain drainage information. Others are updating paper maps. Both types of mapping are of use to OMAFRA.

By providing OMAFRA with updated drainage information in a standard GIS format, we will work at making digital data such as topography, soils, and hydrology available for use in your municipality. Standards typically involve a coordinate reference system such as Latitude and Longitude or UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator). Standards also involve things like accuracy and software formats. The same information can be made available on paper maps to those municipalities who do not use GIS or CAD.

For more information on Land Information Ontario, visit the website at [www.lio.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.lio.mnr.gov.on.ca)

**RETAIL SALES TAX ACT**

In a memo dated July 12, 2000, drainage practitioners were informed of amendments to the Retail Sales Tax Act. The amendment now allows municipal drainage works to be exempt from the Retail Sales Tax provided a statement is signed by a “responsible official of a municipality” indicating that the municipal drainage works are used primarily for agriculture. While there are no guides that accompany this change, it would seem reasonable that the municipal treasurer should sign this statement. As drainage practitioners, this may have an impact on your cost estimates of drainage projects.
CURRENT DRAINAGE ACT GRANT POLICY CONCERNING AGRICULTURAL LAND

In the same July 12, 2000 memo, drainage practitioners were reminded of the current ministry policy on Drainage Act grants for lands currently used for agriculture but intended for residential or commercial development. This policy, which has been in existence since at least 1985, reads as follows:

The Drainage Act was written with the primary intention of providing outlet drainage for agricultural lands. As a result, no grants will be made in respect of the assessments against privately owned lands used for agricultural purposes where the proposed drainage works has been designed with a capacity greater than that deemed required for agricultural lands unless the assessments to be imposed are approximately the same as those that would result if the drainage works were designed for agricultural lands only, and the agricultural lands described in the report are zoned agricultural in the municipal zoning by-law and are so designated in the official plan of the municipality.

Subsequent Drainage Tribunal decisions have indicated that zoning should not be used as an indicator, but instead the engineer should evaluate the “development potential” of a property. Therefore, if a property is currently used for agriculture but has development potential in the foreseeable future, it should not receive the grant.

Another “trigger” for this policy is if the proposed drainage works has been designed with a capacity greater than that deemed required for agricultural land. From the “Design and Construction Guidelines”, the standard design criteria for open ditch municipal drains in agricultural areas is a 2 year storm. For closed drains, the Ministry will accept, without question, the Subsurface Drainage Coefficient Method, up to a 38mm (1 ½”) coefficient. If a higher design standard is being considered for a drainage project and a payment of grant is expected, the project engineer should contact the Ministry prior to the submission of the report.

DRAINAGE PROGRAM REVIEW

A total of 14 public consultation meetings were conducted during March and April 2000. The purpose of the review was to investigate if there were potential improvements that could be made to the Municipal Outlet Drainage Program and to determine if the Tile Loan Program and the licensing under the Agricultural Tile Drainage Installation Act still served a useful purpose. Invitations were extended to farmers through their general farm organizations, and to municipalities, drainage superintendents, drainage contractors, engineers, suppliers and manufacturers. More than 600 stakeholders attended the meetings, which were held in Barrie, Comber, Wingham, Kemptville, Casselman, Strathroy, Cayuga, North Bay, Stratford, Dorchester and Guelph. As well, a detailed questionnaire (34 questions) was available for completion. More than 300 questionnaires were submitted for consideration and approximately 2200 user sessions were recorded from the Ministry’s web site.