

## **Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association (SSCA) – History**

By Blair McClinton, PAg and Juanita Polegi, PAg

The Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association (SSCA) was formed in the late-1980s as a cooperative effort between progressive farmers and interested individuals working within Saskatchewan Agriculture, PFRA and the University of Saskatchewan.

### **Organizational Years (1986 – 1989)**

In the early '80s, many producers were experimenting with no-till (zero till, direct seeding) systems across the Prairies with varying degrees of success. Both the Manitoba-North Dakota Zero Tillage Farmers Association (ManDak) and the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society (ACTS) formed as a way for farmers to share their experiences. Since there was no Saskatchewan organization, several innovative Saskatchewan farmers, interested in no-till, began attending the ManDak conference. A few of these farmers began to ask the question, “Why don't we have a Saskatchewan-based farm group”.

Don Flaten, Provincial Soils Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture at the time, played a key role in helping establish the SSCA. According to Don, “A local farmer, named Clarence Taylor, would stop by my office and drop off copies of the ManDak proceedings. Clarence wanted me to help start a Saskatchewan-based group and told me that I should get in touch with other innovative no-till farmers, like Jim Halford at Indian Head.”

While these farmers were encouraging him to help organize the SSCA, senior management in the Agriculture Ministry actively discouraged Don Flaten's involvement in forming the SSCA. However, even though he had little support in the Ministry, Don developed a proposal to the Saskatchewan Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) for a study to gauge producer interest in a provincial soil conservation group. Approval and funding for the project enabled Jim Halford to be hired as coordinator and meeting dates set.

“One of the first meetings I attended was with Don Acton, Glen Shaw and Larry Gramiak,” said Jim. “We also invited representatives from interested groups to discuss the formation of a provincial soil conservation group”.

Following that meeting, Jim set out on a cross-province tour to discuss the idea with producers. “I visited seven places in a week”, said Jim. His tour took him to Weyburn, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, North Battleford, Melfort, Yorkton and Rosetown. Prior to each meeting, Jim had sent about 200 invitations to people who might be interested in soil conservation, as identified by PFRA and the Ag. Reps.. The ManDak Board of Directors and Alberta Conservation Tillage Association also supported the effort to form SSCA. They provided Jim a list of Saskatchewan farmers who attended their conferences.

Jim said that at each meeting he tried to play the devil's advocate. “I would ask such things as why do we need yet another group in Saskatchewan? And if we do form another organization, what kind of membership do we want?” At the finish of each meeting, each participant was asked to complete a survey about the need for soil conservation in the province.

From each of the 7 meetings, 2 reps were selected to attend another meeting in Saskatoon along with reps from the University of Saskatchewan. It was then that it was decided to hold a meeting in conjunction with the ManDak Annual Conference in Regina in early-1987.

### **Manitoba-North Dakota Zero Tillage Workshop**

#### **Regina, January 22 and 23, 1987**

In the fall of 1985 the ManDak organization was approached to hold their 1987 Workshop in Regina, Saskatchewan. Prior to this the workshops had alternated between Brandon, Manitoba and either Minot or Bismarck, North Dakota. Jim Halford and Larry Koturbash took a formal proposal to the 1986 workshop in Minot.

Jim McCutcheon – one of the earliest farmers in Manitoba to attempt zero till – strongly supported the idea to have the 1987 workshop in Regina rather than Winnipeg which was only 40 miles from his farm. This support, together with the fact that about 50% of the attendees at the ManDak Workshops had been Saskatchewan farmers resulted in acceptance of the offer to go to Regina in January 1987.

The Saskatchewan Workshop Planning Committee for the 1987 workshop consisted of:

- Farmers – Jim Halford (Chairman) and Dale Heenan
- Saskatchewan Agriculture – Don Flaten, Larry Koturbash, Ken Pedersen and Charlie Carlson
- University of Saskatchewan – Glen Hass and Bruce Hobin
- PFRA – Fred Kraft and Gary Carlson

The 9<sup>th</sup> ManDak Workshop held in Regina had an overwhelming attendance of 1200 and proved to be a huge financial success to ManDak – with some funds also retained in Saskatchewan. It was also the momentum that helped to launch the SSCA. The ManDak directors in 1986 are to be commended for their foresight and desire to spread the adoption of zero tillage. The interest in zero tillage in Saskatchewan increased considerably with the 1987 conference having over 800 Saskatchewan farmers attend.

### **Birth of SSCA**

At the 1987 ManDak Workshop the Saskatchewan farmers present strongly endorsed establishment of what became the SSCA!

At about this point, Jim Halford began to pull away from active involvement in the organization. “I wanted only to help get things going,” explained Jim. I was too busy trying to develop equipment to be involved any longer and I also did not want the organization and myself to be perceived as having any conflict of interest if I started to sell seeders.

It was then that Glen Hass, Professor of Extension at the University of Saskatchewan, was approached to become involved. Jim said, “I knew there needed to be a general secretary to do things between the Directors’ meetings. Glen was the man for the job. I give real credit to the early Directors of the organization for all the work they did, but Glen was the real anchor”.

Glen Hass, as the first SSCA executive manager, did the legwork to have SSCA incorporated under the Saskatchewan Non-profit Corporations Act. This included the development of the association's Governance structure, mission and bylaws (see sidebar). Glen also had SSCA registered as a Charity by the Canada Revenue Agency which allows SSCA to receive tax-deductible, charitable donations. Glen said, "At its inception, SSCA was modeled on ManDak, where the volunteer board members were responsible for most of the Association's activities. The regional board structure was developed to follow Saskatchewan Agriculture's extension regions to make it easier for regional directors to work with provincial extension staff." As Executive Director of the new organization, Glen put together the first SSCA newsletter in April 1988.

### **Side Bar: Governance**

#### **Membership Structure**

- Full Members – Individual, Farmer members who hold full voting rights.
- Associate Members – Individual, Non-farmer members with limited voting rights.
- Supporting Members – Corporate members with limited voting rights.

#### **Board Structure**

##### **1987 – 1992 (9 members)**

- President-elect (elected by entire membership for 3-year term on executive)
- President
- Past-president
- 6 regional directors (SW, SE, WC, EC, NW, NE) (elected by members in the specific regions for a maximum of two 2-year terms)

##### **1992 – 1997 (11 members)**

- President-elect (elected by entire membership for 3-year term on executive)
- President
- Past-president
- 6 regional directors (SW, SE, WC, EC, NW, NE) (SW, SE, WC, EC, NW, NE) (elected by members in the specific regions for a maximum of two 2-year terms)
- 2 Industry Directors-at-large (non-farmers) (elected by entire membership for a maximum of two 3-year terms)

##### **1997 – Present (11 members)**

- 6 regional directors (SW, SE, WC, EC, NW, NE) (elected by members in the specific regions for a maximum of two 3-year terms)
- 3 producer Directors-at-large (farmers) (elected by entire membership for a maximum of two 3-year terms)
- 2 Industry Directors-at-large (non-farmers) (elected by entire membership for a

<p>maximum of two 3-year terms)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board of Directors elects the executive consisting of the President and two Vice-Presidents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mission and Vision</b></p> <p><b>Mission Statement</b></p> <p><b>1987 – 1995</b></p> <p>To promote soil conservation practices that reduces soil degradation and maintains economic viability.</p> <p><b>1995 – 2001</b></p> <p>To promote conservation farming systems that improves the land for future generations.</p> <p><b>2001 – 2009</b></p> <p>To promote conservation farming systems that improves the land and environment for future generations.</p> <p><b>2009 – Present</b></p> <p>To promote conservation agriculture systems that improves the land and environment for future generations.</p> <p><b>Vision Statement</b></p> <p><b>2009 – Present</b></p> <p>To be the recognised driver and facilitator of change that leads to conservation agriculture being practiced on prairie agricultural land.</p>

**Projects and Funding**

**Canada-Saskatchewan Agreement on Soil Conservation (1989-1994)**

Over the course of the next couple of years, the final touches were being put on the Canada-Saskatchewan Agreements on Soil and Water Conservation. When the federal government indicated it would like to see a provincial group involved in the soil conservation program, Glen said, “things really began to gel for the SSCA”.

With funding from the Agriculture Development Fund, the SSCA could begin to hire staff. This meant big changes for SSCA. “The original concept of SSCA was now like the ManDak model -- farmers sharing information by coming together once a year”, said Glen. “The Soil Conservation Agreement provided funding that enabled the hiring of staff and a great many more extension activities”.

The original contract with the Saskatchewan Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) was \$3 million over a period from fall 1989 to spring of 2004. Provincial specialists and

regional conservationists were hired for a 3-year period from 1990 – 1993. The original staffing complement consisted of:

- Executive Manager
- Office Manager
- Shelterbelt Specialist
- Weed Specialist
- Economics Specialist
- Rangeland and Forage Specialist
- 6 Regional Soil Conservationists

A conservation tillage specialist position was planned but the position was never filled. In 1991, the provincial staff complement was adjusted to include a Communications Specialist and an Education Specialist. The Weed Specialist and Conservation Tillage Specialist positions were eliminated.

The first staff member hired by the SSCA was John Kiss who became the Executive Manager in late 1989. John feels there were a number of factors that influenced the success of both the SSCA and the soil conservation effort. “The time was right!” John said. “At the time the SSCA received its contract from ADF, there were serious concerns in the communities about the environment. Grain prices were low. The price of Roundup dropped. Equipment manufacturers began focusing on new markets and new machines at that time. The producers were willing to change and try something different.”

In the next few months, John and the Board’s executive conducted countless interviews until Specialists and Regional Soil Conservationists were hired and in place by January, 1990. Pat Flaten who became one of the first employees of SSCA, had been interested in the organization almost from the beginning. “I attended the meeting held at the ManDak Conference in 1987, the first annual SSCA meeting in Saskatoon in 1988 and the second annual meeting in Swift Current in 1989,” said Pat. Pat had a number of reasons for being interested in the SSCA in those early days. “Soil conservation was up and coming,” she explained, “and an exciting bunch of forward thinking people were involved in the effort.” Pat also liked the philosophy of the Board. “Many of the people on the Board had lots of integrity and the desire to “do the right thing.”

One who wanted to do the right thing was Brett Meinert, the first SSCA president. Brett remembers how he first became involved in the SSCA. “I was one of the lucky ones selected by my ADD Board to attend a meeting about soil conservation organized by Jim Halford in Swift Current”, he said. “When I attended the meeting in Regina, I was excited to see the interest in soil conservation in Saskatchewan!” When it was decided at that meeting to form a provincial soil conservation group, Brett said the group had the potential to be a lobbying organization, educational organization and a support group all rolled into one.

Brett recalls the first few SSCA Board meetings were very “stimulating”. Brett said, “While the meetings themselves were interesting, it was the evening sessions that were

most valuable. In the evenings we (the Directors) talked about anything and everything. It was an excellent group to work with". Brett also paid tribute to Glen Hass. "Glen is a tremendous individual. He helped the Association's organizational pains and growth". It was during these growth pains that the opportunity for a non partisan group to lead the soil conservation effort in the Save Our Soils Program presented itself. "It took the Board a lot of discussion to decide how much we (the SSCA) wanted to be involved in this," Brett said. "But we decided to jump in with both feet and I was very proud of the folks we hired and it appears that trend has continued."

SSCA's objectives in this program were to coordinate extension and awareness activities for the Soils Agreement at both the regional and provincial levels. The main priority was to support the Save Our Soils (SOS) Program being delivered by the Agriculture Development and Diversification (ADD) Boards. The regional staff were the heart and soul of SSCA's programming; where the "rubber hit the road." The Regional Conservationists worked closely with the ADD Board Technicians to develop, implement and administer the SOS program at the local level. The regional staff led regional planning and extension efforts developed by the Regional Conservation Teams that included Saskatchewan Agriculture, PFRA, Ducks Unlimited Canada and Saskatchewan Environment staff. Provincial staff worked to coordinate provincial level activities that supported the local efforts by the ADD Boards and SSCA regional staff.

Most of SSCA's success can be attributed to the teamwork of SSCA staff members at both the provincial and regional levels. By working together, SSCA was able to coordinate extension and communication messages at both the local and provincial levels. This coordinated effort helped to build local farm interest in direct seeding as the "thing to do".

Some of SSCA's key achievements in this period included:

- Prairie Steward Newsletter,
- SSCA Annual Direct Seeding Conference,
- Soil Conservation "How-To" Videos 1 and 2,
- Direct Seeding Field Day,
- Project SOILS education program,
- SSCA/PAMI Direct Seeding Manual.

While the key achievement of the Soils Agreement programs like Save Our Soils was starting the movement to direct seeding, the program itself focused on a wide variety of soil conservation practices. Direct Seeding was just one of a couple dozen practices being promoted. Even within SSCA, direct seeding was not the initial focus. Direct seeding was considered uneconomical and impractical in 1990 by most farmers and agrologists. However, a few innovators, helped by lower Roundup prices and better seeding equipment began to push for more information on direct seeding.

While there was interest in doing direct seeding demos through the SOS Program, the program restrictions would not allow ADD Boards to purchase equipment. However, once airdrills became available, local dealers and equipment manufacturers developed

lease programs for ADD Boards. SSCA regional staff encouraged the ADD boards to take advantage of these opportunities and develop direct seeding demonstration programs.

One year into the program, it became very apparent to SSCA staff that interest in direct seeding was building. In early 1991, SSCA staff began planning the first Direct Seeding Conference to be held in Prince Albert in 1992 and also initiated the production of a “How-to” video on direct seeding.

### **Direct Seeding Conference**

Many have recognized SSCA’s 1992 Direct Seeding Conference in Prince Albert as its coming out party. This was the first time SSCA dedicated its annual conference to a single approach to soil conservation. The planning committee mostly consisted of SSCA staff (Garry Meier, John Kiss and Blair McClinton) and Saskatchewan Agriculture extension staff (Barry Swanson, Roy Button and Eric Johnson). After holding a “policy-centred” conference in Regina, 1991, that was criticised by the SSCA board (and other farmers), one of our goals was to design a conference program that would interest farmers.

According to Blair McClinton, “We were tossing around a few conference themes, when Roy Button said that we should focus on direct seeding if we wanted to interest farmers. Looking back at it now, this looks like it should have been an obvious choice. However, it was both risky and controversial at the time. Our instincts on the ground level were telling us that this was the right thing to do but policy-makers in Regina were very sceptical of this decision at the time. I do credit John Kiss for trusting our instincts and defending the committee’s decision.”

The success of the event even took the committee by surprise. They planned the event for between 250 and 300 people. Agricultural events larger than this were unheard of at that time. With two weeks before the conference 300 registrations had been received. McClinton remembers the excitement the Board and Staff felt as they watched the numbers grow. By the event date, over 400 people had preregistered. The only unknown was how many people would try to walk-in.

The event itself was held during a cold spell with daytime highs of -30 C. Even with the bitterly cold temperatures, over 600 farmers came to the event. The Direct Seeding Conference seemed like a ray of sunshine that broke through all the “doom and gloom” messages in the Ag industry at the time.

SSCA decided to continue focusing the conference on direct seeding for the following year in Moose Jaw, where 800 farmers filled a building to capacity. The Direct Seeding Conference continued by that name until 2006. In the peak years of 1994 – 2000, the conference’s annual attendance averaged 1200 people.

### **Direct Seeding Manual**

While the direct seeding conference was an example of good planning, the Direct Seeding Manual was developed almost by accident. What started out as a series of individual projects with two different organizations evolved into something whose value was far greater than the sum of its parts.

In the spring of 1992, SSCA was asked to develop some technical publications related to direct seeding. Blair McClinton started working on a crop rotation guide and David Struthers, a consulting Agriologist, was contracted to develop a weed management guide. Sometime over the summer, SSCA learned that Gord Hultgreen, PAMI, was working on a residue management and seeding equipment guide. According to Blair McClinton, “I had one of those light bulb flash moments and thought that maybe we could combine our efforts. I called Gord and told him about the guides we had in the works and my idea to combine them into a single manual. Gord liked the idea. We arranged to meet a few weeks later along with our managers (John Kiss, SSCA and Phil Leduc, PAMI) and the Direct Seeding Manual was born.”

At a staff planning meeting later that fall SSCA decided to develop a one-day course based on the Direct Seeding Manual. The course was an intense all day affair. A \$25 fee was charged to cover the cost of the manual. Over a three month period in the spring of 1993, 3000 farmers attended one of the courses and took home the Direct Seeding Manual.

Over the next few years, a couple of revisions were made including a major rewrite in 2000. A total of 7000 original manuals were sold. This meant that 12% of Saskatchewan farms purchased a copy.

### **Canada-Saskatchewan Agricultural Green Plan/TransAlta Utilities/Monsanto Canada (1994-1997)**

The Save Our Soils program and SSCA’s support programs ended in March 1993. A few staff remained in the head office to help wrap up the program. The SSCA Board offered one-year contract extensions to Blair McClinton and Garth Patterson to help organize the 1994 Direct Seeding Conference being planned for Lloydminster. While the SSCA Board had proposed that the new Green Plan program should continue to fund SSCA’s efforts in the regions, it was apparent that funding would likely not be available through government sources. Senior policymakers in both Saskatchewan Agriculture and PFRA felt that no more work was needed in this area even though less than 10% of farmers direct seeded.

In the spring of 1993, TransAlta Utilities contacted John Kiss about developing a program to promote direct seeding systems as a way to sequester soil carbon and offset their emissions. Canada had just signed the “Rio Accord” in 1992 and TransAlta, as Canada’s largest privately held utility, was concerned about how they would be affected by climate change regulations.

At the same time, SSCA began discussing program funding with Monsanto Canada. Monsanto had noticed that Roundup sales were rapidly growing in Saskatchewan, but not other provinces. They identified SSCA as a key driver behind direct seeding in Saskatchewan and wanted to ensure SSCA’s programs continued.

In the summer and fall of 1993, SSCA developed a proposal to develop a direct seeding extension effort that would be 50% funded through the new Green Plan program and the remaining 50% shared by Monsanto and TransAlta. At the fall 2003 Board meeting, the Board approved submitting this proposal. However, this was a controversial decision for the Board. It was the first time SSCA would focus solely on direct seeding. And there

were concerns that SSCA's independence, real or perceived, would be lost due to the large corporate funding component.

The proposal was submitted to the provincial Green Plan committee for review. The funding from both Monsanto and TransAlta was approved contingent on matching Green Plan funding. However, some private funding was available by January 1994 to allow SSCA to rehire staff to continue direct seeding courses that winter. The Green Plan committee met in January 1994 and approved project funding. However, they only approved 2/3 of the funding requested by the SSCA proposal and demanded that certain components of the proposal be removed. This decision put the entire project in jeopardy. Since the private funding levels were tied to public support, this reduced the private funding by 1/3 as well. However, the Board decided to proceed with the project. Head Office was then moved to the Indian Head Research Farm. Soon after, John Kiss resigned and Doug McKell was hired as the new Executive Manager. Former NW Soil Conservationist, Blair McClinton was hired as the Assistant Manager.

SSCA received \$1.6 million of contract funding from all sources between 1994 and 1997. Profits from the increasingly successful Direct Seeding Conference helped build SSCA's financial coffers.

While SSCA continued to deliver successful programming to promote direct seeding, this particular project saw the SSCA enter the climate change policy arena. One of SSCA's obligations to TransAlta Utilities was to advocate for agriculture soil sinks to be accepted as a recognised carbon offset. SSCA began working with other provincial soil conservation groups in Canada and the Soil Conservation Council of Canada to promote this idea. SSCA's work in this area helped create interest to not only develop policies but also begin research to more fully document carbon sequestration potential across Canada.

### **Direct Seeding Field Days**

SSCA held its first Direct Seeding Field Day in June 1993 near Moose Jaw. SSCA timed its field day to take place one day before the start of the Western Canada Farm Progress Show in Regina. The field day in conjunction with Farm Progress Show continued until 1999. In 1996, SSCA held a second "north" field day near Wilkie to accommodate farmers in the northern grain belt. From 1997-1999, the north field day was held in cooperation with the Seager Wheeler Farm at Rosthern. From 2000-2006, SSCA continued to assist the Seager Wheeler Farm with their Seeding Trends Field Day.

### **Saskatchewan Conservation Learning Centre (CLC) – 1993 – 1997**

In 1993, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) approached the SSCA to set up a demonstration farm in the parkland area of Saskatchewan under the Parkland Agricultural Research Initiative (PARI). From 1993 – 1997, AAFC provided funding to SSCA to establish and manage the demonstration farm and hire a farm manager. A site, provided by Ducks Unlimited Canada, was located south of Prince Albert. The name of the new farm was the Conservation Learning Centre. It's purpose was to focus on promoting and demonstrating soil and water conservation practices. The CLC also developed an education program work with schools in the region. Pat Flaten, former SSCA SW Soil Conservationist, was hired as the farm manager. Even though it was administered by the SSCA, the CLC operated under the guidance of a local steering committee.

By 1997, the SSCA Board wanted the CLC to strike out on its own as an independent organization. The CLC was incorporated as the Saskatchewan Conservation Learning Centre, Inc. in 1998. To help through the transition, the SSCA provided the CLC with a \$30,000/year grant for three years. The CLC continues to operate south of Prince Albert and has maintained a close relationship with the SSCA.

### **Project SOILS**

Project SOILS is an activity-based education resource for K-12 teachers in Saskatchewan. It was modelled on the highly successful Project WILD wildlife education initiative that is coordinated by the Canadian Wildlife Service and provincial Environment Ministries. Project SOILS was originally developed in 1993 under the guidance of SSCA Education Specialist, Yvette Crane. SSCA received additional funding under the Agricultural Green Plan to revise the Project SOILS manual and offer workshops to train teachers on how to use the materials. The manual was translated into French with the help of the translation service in the Saskatchewan Intergovernmental Affairs Ministry. Lizabeth Nichols, an Education Specialist with Saskatchewan Environment and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, helped to champion the use of Project SOILS materials to Saskatchewan teachers as part of her work promoting wildlife and water conservation education.

### **Canada-Saskatchewan Agri-Food Innovation Fund (AFIF) – 1997 - 2000**

Over this 3-year period, SSCA received around \$1 million through four AFIF projects. In addition to the AFIF funding, Monsanto Canada provided SSCA with \$450,000 over this same 3-year period.

The programming continued to focus primarily on direct seeding systems. However, with direct seeding becoming more common, SSCA staff began developing new methods to reach new adopters. One of these methods was called “Kitchen Table Meetings.” With this delivery model, SSCA staff would identify a key local innovative farmer or “Innovator”. This innovator identified a few local neighbours who did not direct seed and invite them to an informal meeting at the innovator’s home. The SSCA staff person would attend and facilitate these informal meetings. The staff person would use materials in presentation binders to help address the discussion. Another variation of this delivery model was “half-ton tours”. In this case local farmers would show up at a specific location and then proceed to have a local crop tour facilitated by the SSCA staff person. The advantage of this type of approach was that it allowed us to get into direct contact with farmers who normally did not attend meetings or tours.

In the late 1990s, equipment manufacturers began marketing precision agriculture equipment like yield monitors and GPS systems. SSCA, along with Saskatchewan Agriculture staff, began to work with local farmers who were interested in precision farming techniques. SSCA also helped the Indian Head Agricultural Research Foundation (IHARF) establish a Precision Agriculture research site near Indian Head.

SSCA began establishing a series of demonstrations showing the “Do’s and Don’ts of Direct Seeding”. In these demonstrations, SSCA staff setup plots where they deliberately made common seeding mistakes like seeding too deep or too fast or too much seed-placed fertilizer. These demonstrations were effective in helping remind farmers about the direct seeding principles. In 1999, SSCA ordered two plot drills that were funded

through the AFIF infrastructure program. SSCA was able to continue using these drills until its staff programs ended in 2006.

### **GIS Internet Mapserver**

In 1998, SSCA began a joint project with the PFRA GIS Unit to establish an internet mapserver at the GIS Unit. SSCA received funding for this through the AFIF Infrastructure program. The purpose of the program was to provide public access to PFRA's GIS mapping data. This project helped lay the groundwork for the establishment of AAFC's National Land and Water Information Service (NLWIS).

### **2000-2003 Projects**

When the AFIF program came to an end in early-2000, there was no obvious successor for contract funding. SSCA's management team developed several proposals to the CARDS program and to ADF with no success. The new funding programs were being developed to specifically not provide project funding for staffing. In late-1999, SSCA announced that it would be closing its programs down if funding did not become available. In early-2000, Saskatchewan Agriculture informed the Board that it would provide SSCA with \$200,000/year for the next 3-years. Even though this was not sufficient to cover the costs, the Board decided to keep the staff on as part-time employees to help maintain some programming. The Saskatchewan Agriculture funding was reduced to \$150,000 over 3-years in 2003.

This, however, meant changes for SSCA's staffing. Doug McKell, Executive Manager, Claire Neill, Office Manager and Ken Sapsford, WC Soil Conservationist resigned. Blair McClinton was appointed the new Executive Manager. The five remaining regional staff worked on a 2/3-time.

However, this was a short-term situation. By fall, Ducks Unlimited Canada contracted SSCA to lead extension efforts to support their new winter wheat program. This was enough to bring everyone up to full-time again. In early-2001, Monsanto Canada agreed to provide program funding which allowed SSCA to refill the vacancies in the West Central Region and Assistant Manager.

Programming in this period remained focused on direct seeding. However, staff efforts were focused more specifically on field demonstrations, the SSCA website, the annual conference and the Prairie Steward Newsletter. Monsanto was interested in working with the staff to develop targeted programs in areas with low adoption levels.

SSCA has had an internet presence since 1994. The website includes newsletter articles and conference papers. In 2000, with a greater focus on the website, SSCA staff developed basic technical information highlighting the basics of direct seeding management.

SSCA developed the Crop Advisors Workshop to provide training to agrologists and crop advisors working in industry. This train-the-trainers concept ensured that the people advising farmers had the background to provide accurate information on direct seeding and other soil management issues.

## **Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program GHGMP (2003-2006)**

The GHGMP was the last major program effort delivered by the SSCA. This federally funded program was coordinated nationally by the Soil Conservation Council of Canada. This program provided SSCA with around \$340,000 per year for 3-years to promote practices that either sequestered soil carbon or reduced nitrous oxide emissions. The main focus of SSCA's efforts was nutrient management in direct seeding systems. This integrated approach to GHG management was intended to build on the successes achieved with direct seeding.

In addition to field demonstrations, presentations and one-on-one visits, SSCA staff developed 22 factsheets highlighting a number of practices that helped address GHG emissions.

When the GHGMP ended in 2006, SSCA was forced to layoff its regional field staff.

## **Other Miscellaneous Projects**

SSCA has delivered a variety of smaller projects over the years. Some of these include: on-farm fuel use in direct seeding, direct seeding forages, forage rejuvenation with fertilizer and the Prairie Soils and Crops eJournal.

## **Current Projects**

SSCA has received project funding for a few small projects since 2006. The Prairie Soils and Crops eJournal is partially supported by ACAAF funding. This journal is intended to provide some revenue to the SSCA in the future.

SSCA is currently testing the Holos On-farm GHG software with farmers in Saskatchewan as part of a national SCCC project.

## **Climate Change Policy and Research**

SSCA has been at the forefront of climate change policy in the agriculture industry. SSCA's involvement began with the project funding from TransAlta Utilities in 1994. By 1997, SSCA began to look into policy implications of carbon trading for agriculture. One of the first efforts was to promote the concept to policymakers and to put agricultural soil credits on the table for discussion. When agricultural soils was left out of the Kyoto Protocol, SSCA led a coordinated lobby effort along with other Canadian soil conservation groups to promote the importance of agricultural soil sinks to municipal, provincial and federal government officials.

The Board led by John Bennett from Biggar, SK, were concerned that farmers were not going to be fairly compensated for their carbon credits and that companies wanted to sign up farmers to buy their credits before they understood its true value. Another concern John identified was the problem of transferring permanence risk from the emitters to farmers who would then be responsible for maintaining the soil sink. SSCA was one of the first groups to suggest using temporary credits or credit leasing as a way to address permanence risk. SSCA has published several consultation documents on offset system structure for the agriculture sector including papers addressing permanence and baseline issues. As one of the few agricultural organizations working on climate change issues, SSCA has given many presentations on these policy questions to governments and agricultural groups across Canada and the USA.

SSCA was the only farm organization in Canada to have a representative (John Bennett) on the national Sinks Issue Table in the late-90s. This “Table” was one of several issue tables established to identify how to best meet Canada’s obligation under the Kyoto Protocol. Even though this table was dominated by forestry interests, John was able to have agriculture sinks prominently featured in the “Options Report” that came out of this committee.

To deal with the lack of knowledge in the farm community about carbon trading, SSCA directors began giving presentations to farmers, in the late-90s, explaining carbon trading and how it could affect them.

In 2005, SSCA became involved in the first agricultural soil pilot trade through Environment Canada’s PERRL program. This program operated for 3-years and formed the basis for the national tillage reduction offset protocol that is currently being used in the Alberta Offset system.

### **Prairie Soil Carbon Balance Project (PSCB)**

The PSCB is an AAFC research project that was established in 1997 to track soil carbon changes over time at a series of benchmark sites located throughout Saskatchewan. This project was initially jointly funded by the Greenhouse Emission Management Consortium (GEMCo) and AAFC’s Matching Investment Initiative. SSCA was a partner in the project and was responsible for identifying cooperators, and collecting site history data. The PSCB sites were sampled in 1997, 1999 and 2006. They will be sampled again in the fall of 2010.

### **The Future for SSCA**

With the lack of revenue, the SSCA is in a transition period. In 2010, SSCA will be making further staff cuts and from an operational point of view will come full circle to its beginnings where its activities are led by its volunteer directors.

However, the SSCA still sees a need for work to protect our soil resources. At least 30% of Saskatchewan’s farmland is still not adequately protected from soil degradation. Saskatchewan is a world leader in the development of conservation agriculture systems. There is an opportunity for Saskatchewan to position itself as a centre of excellence for conservation agriculture systems. SSCA is currently working to see this happen.

### SSCA Presidents over the Years

<b>Term</b>	<b>Name and Location</b>
1987-1988	Brett Meinert, Shaunavon, SK
1988-1989	Brett Meinert, Shaunavon, SK
1989-1990	Brett Meinert, Shaunavon, SK
1990-1991	Ken Alport, Kyle, SK
1991-1992	Gary Schweitzer, Eston, SK
1992-1993	David Bueckert, Tugaske, SK
1993-1994	Gerry Willerth, Indian Head, SK
1994-1995	Dean Smith, Swift Current, SK
1995-1996	Marv Fenrich, Wilkie, SK
1996-1997	Lorne Crosson, Limerick, SK
1997-1998	Clint Steinley, Empress, AB
1998-1999	Bernie Niedzwiedz, Wynyard, SK
1999-2000	Greg Kane, Nokomis, SK
2000-2001	Don Kelsey, Choiceland, SK
2001-2002	John Bennett, Biggar, SK
2002-2003	Don Horsman, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK
2003-2004	John Clair, Radisson, SK
2004-2005	Darryl Reynolds, Nokomis, SK
2005-2006	Darryl Reynolds, Nokomis, SK
2006-2007	Edgar Hammermeister, Alameda, SK
2007-2008	Edgar Hammermeister, Alameda, SK
2008-2009	Laura Reiter, Radisson, SK
2009-2010	Doyle Wiebe, Langham, SK

### SSCA Staff over the Years

Staff Position	Name	Period
Executive Manager	Glen Hass	1987-1989
	John Kiss	1989-1994
	Doug McKell	1994-2000
	Blair McClinton	2000-Present
Assistant Manager	Blair McClinton	1994-2000
	Juanita Polegi	2002-2008
Office Manager	Carolyn Fife	1990-1994
	Claire Neill	1994-2000
	Marilyn Martens	2000-Present
Regional Conservation Agrologists	Pat Flaten (SW)	1990-1993
	Bob Linnell (SE)	1990-2002
	Garth Patterson (WC)	1990-1995
	Juanita Polegi (EC)	1990-2002; 2004-2006
	Blair McClinton (NW)	1990-1994
	Garry Meier (NE)	1990-1993
	Eric Oliver (SW)	1994-2006
	Garry Mayerle (NE)	1994-2006
	Ken Sapsford (WC & NW)	1994-2000
	David Shortt (NW)	1995-1996
	Tim Nerbas (NW)	1996-2006
	Rich Szwydky (WC)	2001-2006
	David Larsen (SE)	2002-2004
Travis Goebel (EC)	2002-2004	
Weed Specialist	Steve Paquette	1990-1991
Shelterbelt Specialist	Chris Ruschkowski	1990 (8 months)
	Howard Fox	1991-1992
	Chris Zabek	1992-1994
Range and Forage Specialist	Nancy Fraser	1990-1993
Economics Specialist	James Lokken	1990-1994
Communications Specialist	Guy Chartier	1991-1992
	Ray Kettenbach	1992-1993
	Lorne McClinton	1994 (4 months)
Education Specialist	Yvette Crane	1991-1993
Conservation Learning Centre Manager	Pat Flaten	1993-1998

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to this document: Brett Meinert, Jim Halford, Glen Hass, John Kiss, Don Flaten, Pat Flaten, Ken Panchuk.

### About the authors.

Blair McClinton is the current SSCA Executive Manager and has been with the SSCA since 1990. Juanita Polegi was a SSCA employee from 1990 – 2008.