



MEDIA RELEASE

Friends of the Greenbelt Support Agriculture

For Immediate Release
January 11, 2007

Prepared by Nancy Tilt for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Innovative Niagara area farmer Martin Schuele recently received support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation through the Greenbelt Farm Stewardship Program (GFSP) for his efforts to make environmental improvements to his vineyard.

Schuele, along with his wife Lydia and father Reinhold, owns and operates Schuele Vineyards located on Lake Ontario's shoreline just west of Vineland in the Niagara Peninsula.

The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation was created in 2005 to champion activities that preserve and enhance the Greenbelt's agricultural, rural and ecological integrity. It provides support to the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) cost-share programs with a \$1.4 million grant.

"Contributing to a viable agricultural sector while also protecting and enhancing the natural environment is an important part of our overall goal," says Burkhard Mausberg, President of the Foundation.

The Schueles, originally from Germany, have farmed here for twenty-five years. They have always been conscious of the environmental aspect of their farming practices, participating in the EFP program in its earliest years. Schuele recently completed the Third Edition EFP as part of his on-going efforts to keep up-to-date with recommended Beneficial Management Practices (BMP).

Always the innovator, Schuele modifies his farming practices as required, with an eye to energy, labour and cost efficiency. Spraying fungicides on the grapevines is a significant component of vineyard management. Schuele uses LIPCO Tunnel spraying technology developed in Germany to deliver fungicide to the vines while minimizing drift and recovering unused spray for recycling.

However, the German-designed frame supporting the tunnels, and the spray tank, were too small for Canadian conditions. So Schuele built a larger hydraulic frame, adjustable for the width and height of the rows in his vineyard, and incorporated a larger tank.

Schuele's innovation was initially eligible for cost-share funding under the Canada-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program (COFSP) through the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan. COFSP encourages producers to adopt BMP that reduce risk to air and water quality, improve soil productivity and enhance wildlife habitat. Schuele's project qualified under Category 16, Improved Pest Management, for 30% cost-share up to \$5,000.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs support these programs under the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, in agreement with the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition.

Since Schuele Vineyards is located within Ontario's Greenbelt, the farm was also eligible for additional cost-share funding under GFSP. "Needless to say, we were very happy to receive another cheque to help cover costs," Schuele noted. GFSP covers an additional 45% up to a category cap of \$8,000. Because Schuele's project had already been approved under COFSP, he received the GFSP cheque without having to make another application. Applications and approval for both federal and GFSP cost-share funding are delivered through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA).

Schuele's innovations are yet another example of how beneficial management practices not only help the environment, but make economic sense as well. Being able to reduce spray volumes cuts input costs for both pesticides and fuel to run the equipment. Over time the saving in spray volumes easily offsets the cost of equipment. Also reduced drift protects air and water quality.

The advantages of tunnel spraying are many.

Vines are sprayed with fungicides every 7-10 days, up to 10 times, during the growing season. Spray nozzles inside two plastic tunnels that surround the vines on either side of the tractor deliver the pesticide. Overspray is collected at the base of the tunnels and siphoned through a series of filters back into the spray tank. On average this saves about one-third of the spray volume used throughout the year.

Early in the season, when foliage is not fully developed, about 50% of the volume is recycled. Later in the season more spray is trapped on the leaves, making recycled volumes closer to 20%. Schuele has further modified the tunnels with rubber deflectors at their trailing edge that confine the spray for an additional 5% saving.

The tunnels reduce drift by 90%, ultimately benefiting air and water quality as well as minimizing the operator's exposure to spray. Residential homes are in relatively close proximity to the vineyards, so reduced spray is a necessary courtesy to the local community. With the vines planted in a north-south orientation and prevailing winds from the west, Schuele can operate the tunnels on most days. This gives the operator greater flexibility with respect to weather conditions when spraying is required.

Schuele has two spray units—one with a 1500-litre Turbo-Mist tank and the other a 2000-litre Red-Trac tank—larger tanks than originally available and both domestic, making it more practical in terms of finding the necessary fittings. The 2000-litre tank covers about 4 ha, resulting in savings in time as well as fuel by reducing the number of return trips for reloading.

"It's really just common sense," says Schuele. "Farming in a way that looks after the environment is important for the land we work, for our family's health and for those who live around us." As a final thought, he adds, "It's in our own best interest to learn, adapt and keep up with the times."

- 30 -

For further information and photos of the producer and the project, please contact the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Guelph, Ontario Tel: 1-800-265-9751 or Web Site: www.ontariosoilcrop.org.