

Walter and Sharon Petheram are farmers who are making a difference. This husband and wife team has devoted their lives to raising their family, improving their farming operation and increasing the understanding between farmers and non-farmers in Norfolk County.

Walter Petheram grew up on the 200-acre farm that has been in his family for four generations. "I have never moved," he says. They raise about 1000 hogs every year, have 40 sheep and 25 beef cattle. They grow all their own feed including corn and hay, as well as wheat and soybeans, which they sell.

Perhaps the most outstanding part of their lives is the extent of their community involvement. The couple has recently won the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. They received this in part for their involvement in the Norfolk County Fair. They used their vision to transform the few existing food displays into an interactive learning center geared to the County's grade four students.

As well as being actively involved in their community, the Petherams spend a lot of time keeping up with latest technological developments to improve their farm environmentally. They have completed an Environmental Farm Plan and have been following the recommendations that they learned by going through that process.

One of the big changes they have made is in the way that they deal with the manure generated by their operation. They have built a liquid manure storage tank with capacity for an entire year's supply, which ensures that they never have to spread manure when conditions are not optimal. They take care to spread the manure when the ground is in the best condition - not wet or frozen, and incorporate the manure quickly to reduce the amount of odour.

Before spreading manure, Walter lets his neighbours know and tries to spread at a time that will be satisfactory. "I have a good rapport with my neighbours," Walter says.

Walter and Sharon are also enrolled in the Canadian Quality Assurance program. The goal of CQA is to ensure that Canadian-produced meat is the best quality possible. Walter says the program has made them more aware of issues relating to meat quality and has improved the meat they produce. "It is going to guarantee better quality pork," he says.