

Group from China tours local farm

By Bill Rea

Local agricultural operations attract attention far and wide, even from as far away as China.

King City area farmer Tom Dobson spent part of last Wednesday showing his operation to a group of students from Soun College. Deputy Director Anning Ding, manager of the training department, said Soun is in Jiangsu Province, which has been a sister province with Ontario since the mid-1980s. The college trains teachers in a variety of subjects including agriculture. They will be training farmers in Jiangsu when they return home.

The group arrived May 6, and returned home Friday.

While they were here, Ding said they were able to tour some of Ontario, including a trip to Niagara Falls last weekend. They also got a trip to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food offices in Guelph, as well as the chance to see the campus of the University of Guelph. They were able to tour the livestock research centre there, as well as the small farm operated by the University. In addition, they were able to visit a small family farm near Hornby.

Dobson was joined by Colin Elliott of Elmvale. He's a director of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, and Dobson is a representative for York Region.

Ding said the group was interested in getting to know about the operating and management of a farm in Ontario. They were curious about things like government regulations and supports, insurance, ownership and maintenance of equipment, how much can be earned from farming, where farmers get their seeds and where their markets are. When they return home to teach, Ding said the group will be training farmers in such areas as crops, husbandry, horticulture, business management, environmental protection, marketing, etc.

He also said Soun College partners with several Ontario institutions, such as York University, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, Centennial and Georgian Colleges and the Toronto District School Board, as well as Niagara University in New York.

Ding said he's starting the third year of a three-year term in Ontario.

"It's a wonderful place," he declared, adding Ontario has a lot more area than Jiangsu, although there's not much comparison in terms of the number of people. Jiangsu has a population of about 80 million.

Dobson showed the group of 13 students and their interpreters around the cash crop operation he runs with his brother. He mentioned that every December, they strategize and organize detailed plans for the coming year, as well as a longer-term five-year plan.

They have 600 acres available to them, and he discussed such things as crop rotation, equipment status, their financial position, market factors, potential risks, etc.

"It is always a delight to share information regarding best farming practices, within the international agricultural community," he commented later.



Tom Dobson (left), with Anning Ding translating, explained details on his King City area operation to visitors from Soun College. Photo by Bill Rea