

Anti-quarry campaigners gear up once again to protect farm land

The battle has lasted for four years and both sides remain determined to prevail

BY MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Ontario Farmer

Carlisle - Opponents are revving up for the latest battle in their four-year war against a bid by an aggregates company to open a quarry in the middle of an agricultural area in Flamborough.

Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment - a citizen group of farmers and other rural dwellers - has run a grassroots campaign since 2004 against an application by St Marys Cement Inc. to establish a limestone quarry on two adjacent tracts of farmland north of the village of Carlisle.

Picket signs reading We Are Saying No Quarry adorn fence posts and front lawns up and down several concessions and throughout the village, along with a well-publicized website www.StopTheQuarry.ca, demonstrate the popular backing behind the group's ongoing attempt to rally the rural populace against the company's proposed Flamborough Quarry.

Despite FORCE's dogged opposition every step of the

way, however, St Marys has managed to leverage its application along a provincially mandated approval process. The steps have included an application to the City of Hamilton for an official plan amendment and rezoning of the land to allow the quarry, the holding of four public meetings, and the acquisition of a water-taking permit from the Ministry of the Environment to allow the company to conduct water tests necessary for the project's approval.

The application ran into a major obstacle a few months ago, however, when the Ministry of the Environment recently ordered the company to re-do its tests, only months before the water taking permit is due to run out on June 30, 2009.

FORCE is gearing up to oppose the company's attempt to extend the time limit on the permit, says group chairman Graham Flint.

"We are determined to show the depth of the community's opposition to this quarry, and we will use any means to keep the project from occurring," he said in an interview during a casual meeting last week with some prominent members of the group.

"When they bought that land years ago, we thought it would be for another subdivision. We never believed it would be an industrial, open-pit operation."

FORCE BOASTS about 1,200 active supporters, including about 250 in the agricultural sector - greenhouses, hog, dairy and beef operations, market gardening and some cash cropping. They are all within a few miles of ground zero, where the company wants to establish its Flamborough Quarry on 11th Concession East, not far from Milborough Line, which separates the Flamborough part of Hamilton from the Town of Milton.

"This area is an agricultural gem," says Dan Curran Blaney, who grows high-end quality hay for neighbouring equestrian breeding operations in the area of his spread on Milborough Line. "A quarry here could drastically affect all of us."

Two major issues divide the company from the community: the potential effect of quarry extraction activities on the water table; and the noise and dust that comes from blasting and hundreds of heavy trucks bearing aggregate along area roads.

Equestrian operations are sensitive to tremors - an upset pregnant mare will abort - while greenhouses require a plentiful and reliable flow of water.

St Marys has offered to install water tanks in strategic places to ensure supply, but farmers scoff at the prospect of having to port water just to accommodate the interests of an outside

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date the interests of an outside company.

The effects on water are also a major issue for those living in Carlisle, two concessions to the south, where most homeowners and businesses have erected signs opposing the quarry.

HOWEVER, FORCE must confront two problems in the debate. Aggregate and cement-making mineral extraction is considered a strategic industry in provincial policy, which gives deposit holding a privileged place, albeit within a highly regulated legislative framework.

Because it is a highly limited resource, provincial policy trumps municipal official plans.

Also where St Marys is concerned, the opponents are dealing with a company that has built a strong reputation in

"A quarry here could drastically affect all of us."

— Dan Curran Blaney

its industry. St Marys Cement Inc., headquartered in Toronto, is a leading manufacturer of cement and related construction products in the U.S. and Canada. It supplies cement-making materials to the Great Lakes region and is also a significant producer of concrete and aggregates to the Ontario market.

The company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Votorantim Cimentos, an international cement manufacturer based in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

St Marys has been following rigorously the guidelines of the approval process, and tried through four public meetings to work with the community's concerns.

The company has committed to following strict procedures for minimizing the impact of operations on neighbouring residents and communities.

They include:

- Following best management practices to reduce noise and vibrations created by aggregate extraction, particularly from blasting and the operation of industrial machinery.
- Watering unpaved roads and sweeping paved roads regularly around its facilities to control and reduce the spread of dust.
- A trucking policy that includes rules regarding local speed limits, such as not arriving before operational hours, obeying all road signage and keeping vehicles in good repair.
- Following groundwater

monitoring procedures at all its quarry and pit sites.

- A workforce well trained in following established policies for the industry.
- A demonstrated record with awards of continuous improvement in environmental performance, including the principles of recycling in its handling of solid waste.

"We are proud of our environmental record and remain committed to partnering with local residents to develop strategies aimed at protecting the environment," the company says on its website.

"Over the past four years, St Marys has received 25 awards for rehabilitation and environmental achievement from the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association."

HERE ARE the highlights of the four-year battle between FORCE and the company:

- Early 2004 - Lowndes Holdings Corp acquires two agricultural properties with a total 530 acres on 11th Concession East, and prepares prelimi-

nary technical studies to establish a limestone quarry.

- June 2004 - Lowndes holds a town hall meeting to explain its plans, but runs into strong neighbourhood opposition.
- September 2004 - Company submits a formal application to the city of Hamilton for an official plan amendment and property rezoning.
- June 2006 - St Marys Cement buys Lowndes Holdings Corp. and takes over the application.
- Between autumn 2005 and spring of 2006 a combined aggregate resource team works on technical reports and issues a transportation terms of reference study.
- Meetings on the proposals are held in June 2007, November 2007, and January and June 2008. The neighbourhood rallies each time.
- July 2008 -- An environment consulting firm undertakes ground water tests under St Marys temporary water-taking permit from the Ministry of the Environment.
- Autumn 2008, the ministry orders testing to be redone.

Drought increases antioxidants in soys

Farmers may not like a year with extreme weather but it

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