

A world-renowned soil mapping company, right in Tavistock



By Lee Griffi

A Tavistock company is taking soil mapping to an entirely new level. SoilOptix is a unique topsoil analysis system that boasts accuracy and precision in agriculture and a value-added layer that fits into the everyday management decisions growers make on their fields.

Paul Raymer is the Co-Founder and President and tells us that soil mapping is cool, trendy and at the of the day helps to service what our farmers are looking for. "A farmer is looking for pockets of opportunity. Where can they save on fertilizer, add seed or water, wherever they want to do to mend the soil. The data from our technology allows farmers to make those

decisions."

The technology at the core is a sensor of about one metre long. It is a passive sensor meaning it works like a sponge. Raymer explains how the technology works. "Soil is always in a form of a geological decay. Gamma radiation coming out of the ground is just like popcorn. The sensor then picks up on that and can analyze the soil. Once the survey is completed, the field technician will take physical samples to go to a lab for measurement. We do our magic with the data to blend them together and create the map. All the various components that a farmer would want to see would be there."

Soil management has become an integral

part of farming, and Raymer says the results from the analysis guides the farmer in how to best treat the land. "There could be a high pH in this area and lower in that area, and it gives them an idea of how to best manage the soil across the field. It really is all about providing the right soil treatment methods at the right places in a field to keep the soil healthy.

Six years ago, SoilOptix had a decision to make in terms of a change in its business model. "In 2016, we started to get approached by other service providers who were asking if it was something they could offer. We thought maybe we could shift our business from operating locally and independently to start partnering in other regions. We would sell them the technology, but we would become the data processing centre. We don't formally label it as a franchise model, but it does have many similarities." Raymer says once they have gone over the data, a report is given to the service provider who delivers it to their customer.

Despite starting small in the Oxford County area, the company has turned into an international power in their field. "We have a lot of pins on the map. We went international in 2017 and are in 14 different counties right now," adds Raymer. "It's been a pretty interesting journey, and it's helping put Tavistock on the map."

Raymer says he would like to see the company experience continued growth for the betterment of the industry. "What

we find rewarding is how we are helping the agricultural community. Not only from an economic standpoint but also from an environmental one. Some synthetic fertilizers are not the best for the environment, so helping farms optimize their soil inputs is important." The carbon level in the soil is becoming an industry on its own, especially in parts of Europe. "It's an interesting avenue where we are going to see a lot of rapid change. To be able to understand what the carbon levels are in the soil would allow the planting of correct plant species."

Raymer has nothing but compliments for his nearly 20 employees and explains what type of person he looks for when hiring. "The last few hiring rounds have been technicians and production people with the skillset of GIS and a statistical background. They are young, but a vibrant and talented group. We train with what the agricultural component needs to be and give them a lesson in Farming 101."

The SoilOptix offices are located on the west end of Tavistock and as the business grew, the number of available desks was at a minimum. "We were facing the possibility of moving our office with the number of staff, but the pandemic forced us into more of a virtual situation and we will be staying here for the foreseeable future." Raymer adds the team utilizes virtual meetings and play online games to be able to connect outside of actual work.

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