



York Region Environmental Alliance

Finding solutions for community sustainability

2015 Annual Report



YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

WHO WE ARE

Formed in 1999 to initially campaign against the cosmetic use of pesticides, the York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA), a non-profit, registered charitable organization, has continually expanded its mandate to address ecological issues that impact our health and the health of our environment. We reach thousands of people annually in York Region, the Greater Toronto Area and beyond, through community events, workshops, seminars, e-news, our website and Facebook page.

The York Region Environmental Alliance is governed by a volunteer board of directors and is administered by part-time staff and volunteers.

The background of the lower half of the page features a grayscale image of tall grasses and dandelion seed heads. Two bees are shown in flight, one near the top center and another on the left side, both appearing to be interacting with the dandelion seeds.

2015 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Susan Sigrist, Chairperson

Sharon Bradley, Secretary

Sylvia Bowman, ON rep

Mike O'Hara

Lee Wei Li

Peter Secord

Gloria Marsh, E.D. & Biochar Field Trial Coordinator

Patty Ella, Accountant, PME Management Solutions

BIOCHAR UPDATE

YREA established a research site in a York Region Forest to test the efficacy of biochar in suppressing soil phytotoxins produced by Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). Three years of YREA involvement in pulling Garlic Mustard (GM) at Bakers Woods in Vaughan has not eliminated it. Garlic Mustard is an invasive alien known to produce soil toxins that weaken many of our native plants and trees. It displaces native wildflowers and hinders tree health by interfering with the growth of fungi that bring nutrients to plant roots. Research conducted elsewhere concluded that biochar can improve growth in toxic soils and may be useful in restoring soil health. Biochar could be instrumental in our fight to control this weed.



Porritt Tract, York Region Forest

To date, the urban tree trials have shown that biochar is working very well as a soil conditioner, with higher amounts of organic matter, more moisture retention and better visual appearance of trees treated with biochar/compost than compost alone or untreated trees. See difference below -



Muscledwood - biochar/compost

Vaughan

Muscledwood - compost

Agricultural field trials of biochar on cabbage have been completed and although crop yields were similar between NPK alone and biochar/compost NPK, there were higher levels of some nutrients retained in soil and higher cation exchange capacity with the biochar. When biochar is added to soil it sequesters carbon and suppresses methane and nitrous oxide, thereby reducing agricultural GHGE. A onetime biochar application raises soil pH, obviating the need for continuous liming.



STRENGTH IN PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

PROVINCIAL PLANNING REVIEWS

2015 was a year of meetings and consultations. The Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review saw YREA represented at deliberations regarding the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. Comments and concerns were collectively submitted via a number of our affiliations, including Ontario Nature and the Greenbelt Alliance. Of the 87 recommendations in the preliminary report, which include strengthening environmental policy and ensuring a fair and open review process, of main concern to our region is that Simcoe County be included in the Greenbelt Plan to help rationalize planning in that area.

INCINERATION

Ontario Zero Waste Coalition has repeatedly voiced concerns on behalf of its members (which include YREA) over proposed incinerators to address waste diversion. There are serious health implications regarding emissions of toxic substances while current monitoring remains inadequate. True GHGE reductions should look at the full lifecycle of materials being destroyed and the carbon footprint of them having to be replaced. Allowing the burning of waste (or what we would rather refer to as valuable resources that largely could be recycled and should have diversion programs in place) would be counter to the Province's stated goal of reducing waste and improving diversion.

At a time when municipalities and countries that have been major proponents of incineration are turning away from them (Peel Region, Vancouver, Denmark, Japan), at a time when we are better able to understand the health and environmental consequences of their emissions, the Province should be doing everything it can to discourage incineration facilities and truly commit to Zero Waste.

YREA has been advocating for less packaging and a ban on Polystyrene since 2008. If there was enough commitment to implement policies to reduce waste - there wouldn't be a need to burn it.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

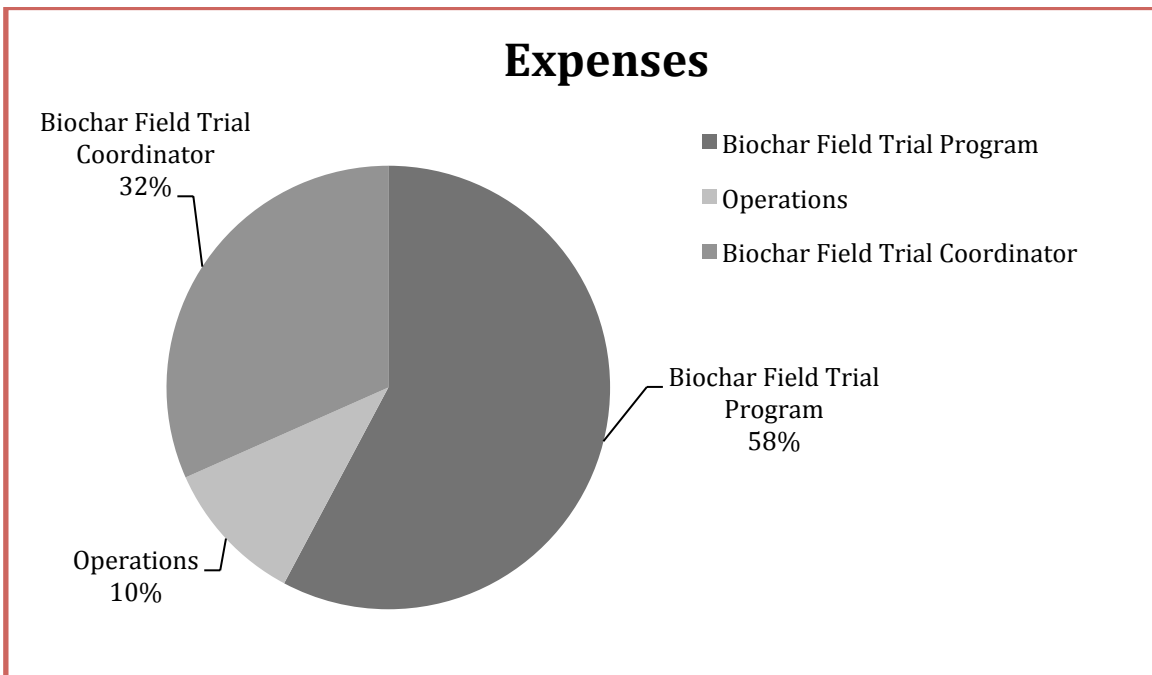
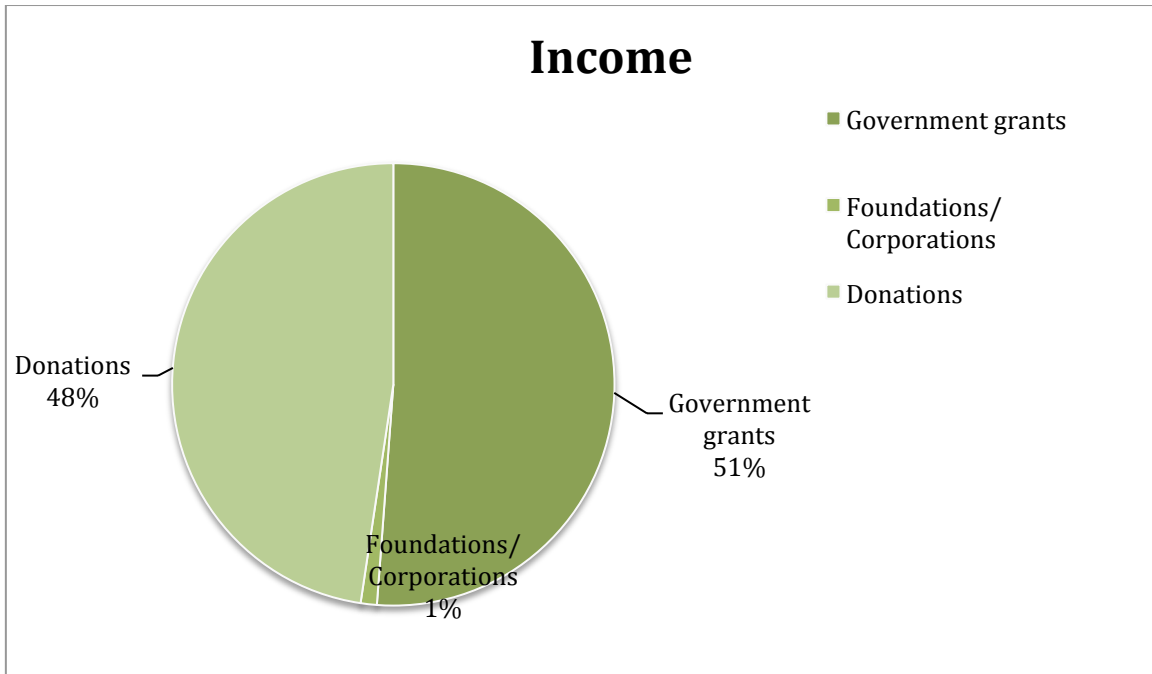
YREA participated in a number of public events including Healthy Yards and Mill Pond Splash, Richmond Hill; Schomberg Agricultural Fair, King; Earth Hour and Woodbridge Farmers Market Environment Day, Vaughan; and York Region Spring Forest Festival.

We were on the stakeholder advisory committee to Vaughan's Municipal Energy Plan; provided input regarding Bayview Avenue EA and David Dunlop Observatory Park Master Plan, Richmond Hill.



YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

2015 FINANCIAL YEAR END



SINCERE GRATITUDE TO OUR FUNDERS



A very special thank you to the JPM Charitable Foundation for initial 2 year funding to kick-start our biochar research. We couldn't have accomplished what we did without their early support.

A heartfelt thanks to all our individual donors, and especially to those who have generously sustained YREA with yearly donations.

GUARDIAN \$2000 & UP

Gloria Marsh
Anonymous

PROTECTOR \$1000 - \$1999

CUSTODIAN \$500 - \$999

Marilyn Isaac-Stewart

STEWARD \$200 - \$499

Jessica Ginsburg
Ken & Sylvia Halligan
Diane Keating
Susan Sigrist & Mark Hubbard

KEEPER \$100 - \$199

Sylvia Bowman
Sharon & Jim Bradley
Terry Knight
Jean-Paul Morson
Debbie Schaefer
Deb Schulte

FRIEND \$20 - \$99

Stephen Cockle
Catherine Marshall
Lee Wei Li
Mike O'Hara



We thank the following volunteers who have helped us with our activities or represented YREA at meetings and community events:

Sylvia Bowman, Sharon Bradley, Jim Bradley, Sylvia Halligan, Gloria Marsh, Tanya Marsh, Mike O'Hara, Lee Wei Li, Peter Secord, Glenn Shukster, Susan Sigrist.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2016

We envision another 2 more years of planning before our biochar enterprise is up and running. During this time, our intention is to more fully explore biochar potential and its various unique uses. Monitoring the urban tree and forest trials will also carry on. All a lengthy process, but one hurdle has now been removed - biochar has been approved as an organic soil amendment by the Federal government.

Our outreach activities at community environmental and agricultural events will focus on raising awareness of the benefits of biochar, industrial hemp, shrinking our ecological footprint and what we can all personally do to reduce our impact on climate change. We will be available to provide stakeholder input during municipal consultations in areas of our concern.

We have also committed to once again offering SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING workshops. Our message from this campaign is very timely as it reinforces municipal conservation initiatives.

SUSAN SIGRIST
CHAIRPERSON

GLORIA MARSH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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