



# MAAP restores gravel pits to farm land – for free

**AL MURRAY: BEFORE**



**AL MURRAY: AFTER**



**BY FRANCES ANDERSON**  
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**B**elgrave-area dairy farmer, Murray Thompson, got two acres more workable land this fall, and Allan Murray, who farms near Seaforth, got five acres of cropland, for free!

Their farmland was restored under a rehabilitation program for abandoned gravel pits, called MAPP (Management of Abandoned Aggregate Properties Program (MAAP)). It's operated by The Ontario Aggregate Resources Corporation (TOARC), based in Burlington.

There are as many as 5500 pits and quarries across the province deemed "abandoned" because they existed prior to 1990 when the Aggregate Resources Act was passed, and have never been

licensed. They are often way-side pits of less than five acres.

MAAP works with land-owners to rehabilitate these sites, improving their use, whether for farming or natural habitat. The program aims to do 30 projects a year – half in the spring and half in the fall, and tries to concentrate its efforts in one location at a time in order to be most efficient.

Thompson and Murray were among a dozen land-owners in Huron County with pits rehabilitated his past fall. Next spring, it will be in Northumberland.

"We had no plans to be in Huron County, but we had a lot of calls," said project coordinator Danielle Solondz.

Murray was one of the callers. He learned about MAAP through a local landscaper, Paul Vander Molen, and has been lobbying for the program ever since he bought a farm with an old gravel pit three years ago.

"It was in the middle of a field, and a real inconvenience," said Murray. "I had



**MURRAY THOMPSON: BEFORE**

**MAAP project  
co-ordinator  
Danielle Solondz**



to farm around it. You couldn't drive up and down."

MAAP's construction supervisor Paul Hartnett visited Murray's farm and took soil samples. The topsoil was three feet deep in some places, so he could recontour the field and still have enough topsoil to crop.

"They were a great bunch. They done what I wanted and we worked together on it. I helped out with a mini-excavator, relocating tiles," Murray told Ontario Farmer.

"It was all done within a week...I'll be planting it into soybeans this spring."

In contrast, Hartnett approached Thompson because MAAP was working in the area. He had opened a pit in 1985, to get gravel to improve his farm yards, but the pit was in the middle of the farm and created a five metre drop, posing a danger for anyone working the field.

Again, Hartnett took photos of the site, and soil samples, and came up with a plan that used the existing topsoil.

The process required a couple of site visits over six

months, but the actual land moving was done in three days, Thompson said. He has now seeded it down to return the area to hay field.

Agriculture "is actually my favourite type of rehabilitation because I like seeing unproductive land put back in production," said Hartnett, who has a degree in landscape architecture. However, "each site is unique and not all sites can go back to agriculture.

He tries to work with the material on site.

"It's not like we create a hole to fill a hole." Furthermore, "it's usually cost prohibitive to bring in topsoil because of trucking costs. We don't import "fill" because there's a liability with what you bring in."

In a lot of cases, the plan is to strip off existing top soil, regrade the land to a 5:1 slope – which is the safe grade for a tractor from a design perspective – and then to have a balance of topsoil."

"I test with a mini excavator to see the depth of top soil," said Hartnett. If there's eight inches he usually has

enough to make most sites useable.

Once the landowners approve the plans, Hartnett holds a mandatory pre-bid meeting for contractors where they visit all the sites in the area and discuss the work to be done.

"There's absolutely no cost to the landowner," said Hartnett. "I do the design and the low bid wins the contract."

Gravel pit owners pay a licence fee of 11.5 cents per tonne of aggregate they remove, and half a cent of that is designated to MAAP, generating about a half million dollars per year.

Since the MAAP program began in 1997, it has spent \$6.3 million to rehabilitate over 1300 acres at 320 sites.

This amounts to about \$5,000 to restore each acre of land. With farmland selling for \$10,000 an acre, it's good value for landowners restoring gravel pits to cropland.

Both Murray and Thompson both recommend it.

"Absolutely, no question!" said Murray. "For sure!" agreed Thompson.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL HARTNETT



**MURRAY THOMPSON: AFTER**

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