

New Hydro One response team



A new **Hydro One** farm rapid response team will streamline the sometimes lengthy and complicated process of solving stray voltage or other on-farm electrical issues.

Just don't expect the team to help you figure out your billing issues, say those operating the new service.

Introduced in September, the team is the result of the combined effort of the electrical service

provider and the **Ontario Federation of Agriculture**.

"In the past there has always been a bit of a void that farmers can find themselves in (with regard to stray voltage issues)," says **Daniel Levitan**, Hydro One director of external relations. "That's what we're trying to fill with this group."

The service has a dedicated toll-free phone number (1-888-405-3778) and a page on the Hydro One website. After contacting the service, farmers complete a one-page form and then are put in touch with the stray voltage specialist in their area who reviews the problem and does testing.

An engineer from Hydro One's lines group audits test results and provides "a second set of eyes," says Levitan.

The utility will create a central database of stray voltage incidents and solutions to share with others in the sector to build knowledge about the issue.

Hydro One receives 150 to 200 calls annually about the issue, says **Tony VandenBoomen**, who manages the team. "With the increased awareness and quicker response, I believe the number may climb," he says. **BF**

New spud offers exciting grower possibilities



A new potato to Ontario markets demonstrates opportunities that can develop from consumer trends.

The variety, **Carisma**, is produced with diabetic and health-conscious consumers in mind, according to **Len Brackenbury**, field manager at **EarthFresh Foods** in Waterdown. The potato has a lower glycemic response than other starches.

"With **Carisma**, we're able to provide potatoes to a market that hasn't been purchasing potatoes before," says Brackenbury. "Potato consumption is falling year after year; this is a way we can gain it back."

EarthFresh is the exclusive Canadian grower, supplier and packager but plans to contract other growers. "This, apart from the glycemic index, is a good potato. Good skin finish, good yields, a good yellow variety," notes Brackenbury.

"There's a lot of innovation in the industry. There will be a push toward health attributes in potatoes; it's the latest interest."

This innovation results from consumer education, says **Vanessa Currie**, potato research technician at the **University of Guelph**. "Everyone along the value chain is interested in educating the consumer on varieties and quality.

"The industry continues to be driven by customer demand; growers will need to be nimble in trying new varieties and adopting new technologies," says Currie.

Carisma was developed in the Netherlands, according to the **EarthFresh** website. **BF**

The onion's perceived health benefits

It's time for farmers to think about planting more onions, says a **University of Guelph** researcher who is spearheading a new method to extract the humble vegetable's most healthful ingredient.

Suresh Neethirajan, principal investigator in the university's **Bionanotechnology Laboratory**, says his engineering team's research shows quercetin extractions from certain onions can kill colon cancer cells.

Quercetin is a flavonoid, an antioxidant thought to produce an anti-inflammatory effect and to benefit immune systems.

Neethirajan says the university's extraction process uses superheated high-pressure, steam-based water

technology. Other techniques leave behind chemical residues that make extractions unfit to use as food additives or in biopharmaceutical compounds. The university's process doesn't leave any harmful residues behind.

The approach is ready to be taken into commercial production, he says. "We have established a proof of concept. We have a framework," says Neethirajan.

Jason Verkaik, who grows onions at his **Carron Farms Ltd.** in the Holland Marsh and is chair of the **Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association**, estimates Ontario producers grow 7,000-plus acres of onions. These vegetables supply the

domestic market for most of the year and are also exported along the Eastern Seaboard.

He says demand for onions has remained constant but will grow as Ontario populations with South and Southeast Asian and Middle and Far East roots grow. **BF**

