

# GOOD NEWS BITE

## SPARK Program Pilot a Success at Ridgetown Campus

**The Office of Research is pleased to announce that the SPARK program has been successfully launched at the University of Guelph's Ridgetown Campus.**

**SPARK** is an acronym for Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge. It's a unique training opportunity for students to gain experience in written communications -- from hard news to public relations. Through SPARK, students acquire marketable skills, knowledge and a media portfolio they can take into the professional world. SPARK articles appear in news publications across Ontario, particularly the farm media.

A SPARK story is based on research important to the lives of Canadians. It's written using a journalistic approach, and reviewed and approved by researchers before being released. SPARK writers are paid student wages and have the opportunity to advance their writing abilities by working with University communications professionals. At Ridgetown, the SPARK program is coordinated by Liz Meidlinger, Communications Manager, and Katie Savage (a former SPARK writer on the Guelph campus).

"SPARK writers have a great opportunity to highlight Ridgetown's many research programs to producers, industry and community stakeholders," says Owen Roberts, Director of Research Communications, University of Guelph, who started the SPARK program 20 years ago. "For this pilot, Ridgetown Campus provided story ideas, office space and guidance while the Guelph campus provided editing, distribution services and budget. It's a partnership that worked out for everyone, and we definitely want to work together to turn the Ridgetown SPARK pilot into a permanent program."

**Let's Meet Ridgetown's First SPARK Writer** - Paulo LaBerge, first-year Bachelor of Bio-Resource



Management student is Ridgetown's first SPARK writer. Through the program, Paulo had the opportunity to interview and write stories about various researchers on campus. "Being from Mississauga, this has been a great learning experience for me. It has given me insight into the tremendous possibilities for Ontario agriculture." says LaBerge. And he's now a published journalist; his first piece has been posted on the Canadian Farm Business Management Council website.

Base funding for research programs at Ridgetown Campus is provided by the OMAFRA/U of G Partnership, and further enhanced through partnerships with industry.

**About the Photo:** SPARK Writer Paulo LaBerge with Ridgetown Campus Research Program Co-ordinator, Ken McEwan. Paulo interviewed Ken regarding his Ontario Farm Input Prices research project.

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