



**Premier's Award for
Agri-Food Innovation Excellence**

Celebrating

Ontario's crop of new ideas!
2008

Espanola

The 55 recipients of the 2008 Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation are announced in 2009.

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Message from the Premier

A Personal Message from the Premier

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, I am delighted to extend warm greetings to the leaders of and stakeholders in the agriculture and food industry as we recognize the invaluable contributions of farmer-innovators to our province's agri-food sector.



To remain competitive in today's global market and to ensure our continued prosperity, all sectors of the economy – including the agri-food sector – must look to innovation to gain advantage. These awards are testament to the vigorous culture of innovation that characterizes our province's agri-food industry and a fitting tribute to the talented women and men who drive it. Our government remains firmly committed to recognizing and encouraging innovation in Ontario agriculture and to ensuring the ongoing vitality of our agri-food industry.

As Premier, I am proud to recognize the farmers whose innovation has helped them thrive in this competitive sector, and I applaud your dedication, creativity and hard work. My hearty congratulations go out to this year's award recipients on your tremendous success in generating new products, creating jobs and building opportunity.

As we continue to work together to harness innovation to build an even stronger Ontario, please accept my best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dalton McGuinty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dalton" being larger and more prominent than the last name "McGuinty".

Dalton McGuinty, Premier

Message from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

A Message from the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky

The Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence recognizes that primary producers, agri-food businesses and agri-food related organizations, have always been innovative in the running of their businesses and will foster even greater innovation across the province's agri-food sector.

We received more than 180 applications for this year's award, and I continue to be impressed by the calibre and breadth of ideas being showcased through these submissions.

The ideas that are springing forth as a result of agri-food related innovations will not only ensure the ongoing vitality of our agri-food industry but also leave a legacy for generations to come. Some may even change the face of the agri-food sector.

I am proud to recognize the 2008 recipient of the Minister's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. On behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I congratulate all 55 winners of the 2008 Premier's, Minister's and regional awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, and I thank all of you who dare to think outside the box and open up a world of opportunity for all to share.

Sincerely,



Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs



Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company – Prince Edward County

Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company is combining tradition with innovation – the fine craft of artisan cheese-making, in a modern, green environment. The dairy is the largest artisan cheese manufacturing facility in Eastern Ontario to process goat and sheep milk. It's also Canada's only certified Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) dairy.

This state-of-the-art facility's solar, wind and geothermal technologies have helped reduce its energy consumption by 60 per cent. The dairy's sustainability theme is carried throughout the entire enterprise, from environmentally-friendly waste processing to green cleaning agents and biodegradable packaging. Their chevre (goat cheese) packaging, for instance, is a corn-based container that is 100 per cent biodegradable. The dairy has also created subterranean caves crafted out of poured cement to age its cheese. The walls are left unfinished and natural, providing a steady, cool environment with little energy required.

Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company has received multiple industry 'green building' awards for using environmentally friendly materials, such as sustainable wood and an innovative, green concrete mix. The dairy has also garnered top awards for its products and promotes cheese education by offering regular cheese tasting seminars, courses and summer internships.

When it comes to producing a quality product, 'going green' and sharing knowledge, you could say this dairy is 'the big cheese' in its field.



Minister's Award Winner

Hillside Gardens Limited – Simcoe County

Hillside Gardens Ltd. is a family farm that has supplied quality produce to consumers for more than four decades. Their latest innovation is helping to build trust in food safety and traceability by strengthening the 'gate to plate' connection.

Ron Gleason, president, redesigned an existing software program for use as an innovative farm traceability program. The farm has hosted a pilot traceability project and shares its knowledge with other producers through on-farm tours and industry presentations. This innovation can be used by other growers to monitor their physical inventory, manage planting dates, spray records, production planning, staffing needs, and enhance food safety and traceability.

The program is capable of tracing all field activities from harvest to packing, to shipping dates and destinations. At the farm, lot IDs are assigned in each step in the process, and the end product is dated with a bar code sticker. The wireless, computerized system will only allow product that has been assigned to a load to be picked and scanned. This improves many aspects of the business, from rotation and quality issues to recall efficiency and inventory control. The system provides "real time" inventory and work is underway to expand its capabilities.

This innovation is giving the agri-food sector new tools that can help build consumer trust in Ontario food, from field to fork.



Regional Award Winners



**Lowey's Produce –
Rainy River District**

Reduce, reuse and recycle. Blair Lowey used these principles to rebuild and retrofit his operation with a high efficiency greenhouse and heating system. He designed new heat retention and heat generation systems that have improved efficiencies throughout the greenhouse process. The new clean energy boiler runs on biomass gasification. As a result, Lowey's Produce has reduced electrical energy costs by as much as 40 per cent, and totally eliminated its natural gas costs. The innovation allows the production of more products and crops year-round, which is significant in northern Ontario.



**Meeker's
AquaCulture –
Manitoulin District**

Meeker's AquaCulture has developed environmentally-friendly compost by mixing by-products from Ontario's fish and forestry industries. Mike Meeker thought there had to be a better destination for these by-products than the local landfill. He experimented by churning fish offal and sawdust together in a modified cement truck on his farm. The result is a successful compost product that has a high nutrient value for lawns, flower beds and field crops. Today, approximately 1.5 million pounds of fish by-product from other fish producers in Northern Ontario are used in compost production. Up to 40 tonnes of compost are produced each week. The product, sold in 30 lb tote bags, has attracted big retail partners like Costco, and has drawn praise for its quality from organic growers.

Regional Award Winners



**Nurtural Horse –
Sudbury District**

In 1997, Gerry Guy and Zoe Brooks bought a 500-acre horse farm. There was just one hitch – they'd never owned a horse before. By 2004, they were raising Canadian horses and mastering the basics of natural horsemanship, viewed as a kinder, gentler way of training horses. These horse whisperers have also developed a bitless bridle that enhances control and communication during horse training. The patented product, The Nurtural Bitless Bridle, is now sold in 46 Canadian tack stores and in Europe. This husband-and-wife team has gone from novice to innovative leader, creating jobs and contributing to the equestrian industry. Nurtural Horse is a galloping success.



**Penokean Hills
Farms Inc. –
Algoma District**

There's good eating and good profits in high-quality beef cattle raised on field peas and barley. This group of farmers generates extra income by growing feed crops that are adapted to northern Ontario conditions. This, along with a strict genetics protocol and a strong marketing strategy for boxed frozen and fresh beef cuts, is a profitable combination. Their ground beef, for example, regularly sells out at a \$1-per-pound premium. By using local feed instead of importing from southern Ontario, the group has also lowered their carbon footprint.

Regional Award Winners



Sudbury West Nipissing Abattoir Producer Group – Sudbury District

While it's currently mainly about the beef, this operation will soon be about hogs and sheep, too. At the end of August 2008, a group of producers and a meat retailer invested enough capital to re-open a meat plant at a local store. The abattoir is now slaughtering 20 head of cattle per week, with plans to expand to other livestock. The partners are also looking to create a regional brand of beef. Consumers are getting locally raised meat, the growers have lowered their costs by having a local slaughterhouse, and the local economy benefits from the jobs the enterprise has created.

Past Award Highlights

Premier's Award Winners:

2007 – Bill and Caroline Nightingale, B&C Nightingale Farms (Norfolk County), for their work in improving Ontario's fresh vegetable yields by adapting the use of high tunnels over vegetable field crops.

2006 – David VanderDussen, NOD Apiary Products Ltd. (Hastings County), for developing Mite-Away II, an environmentally friendly product to protect honeybees from mite infestations, which is exported around the world.

Minister's Award Winners:

2007 – David Freeman, Freeman Farms (Grey County), for his innovation in developing freeze-dry technology and building a state-of-the-art processing plant equipped to process botanicals for use in nutraceuticals and whole foods.

2006 – Fritz and Paul Klaesi, (Renfrew County), for adapting the use of technology that generates electricity from manure in Ontario.

Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence

For more information
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