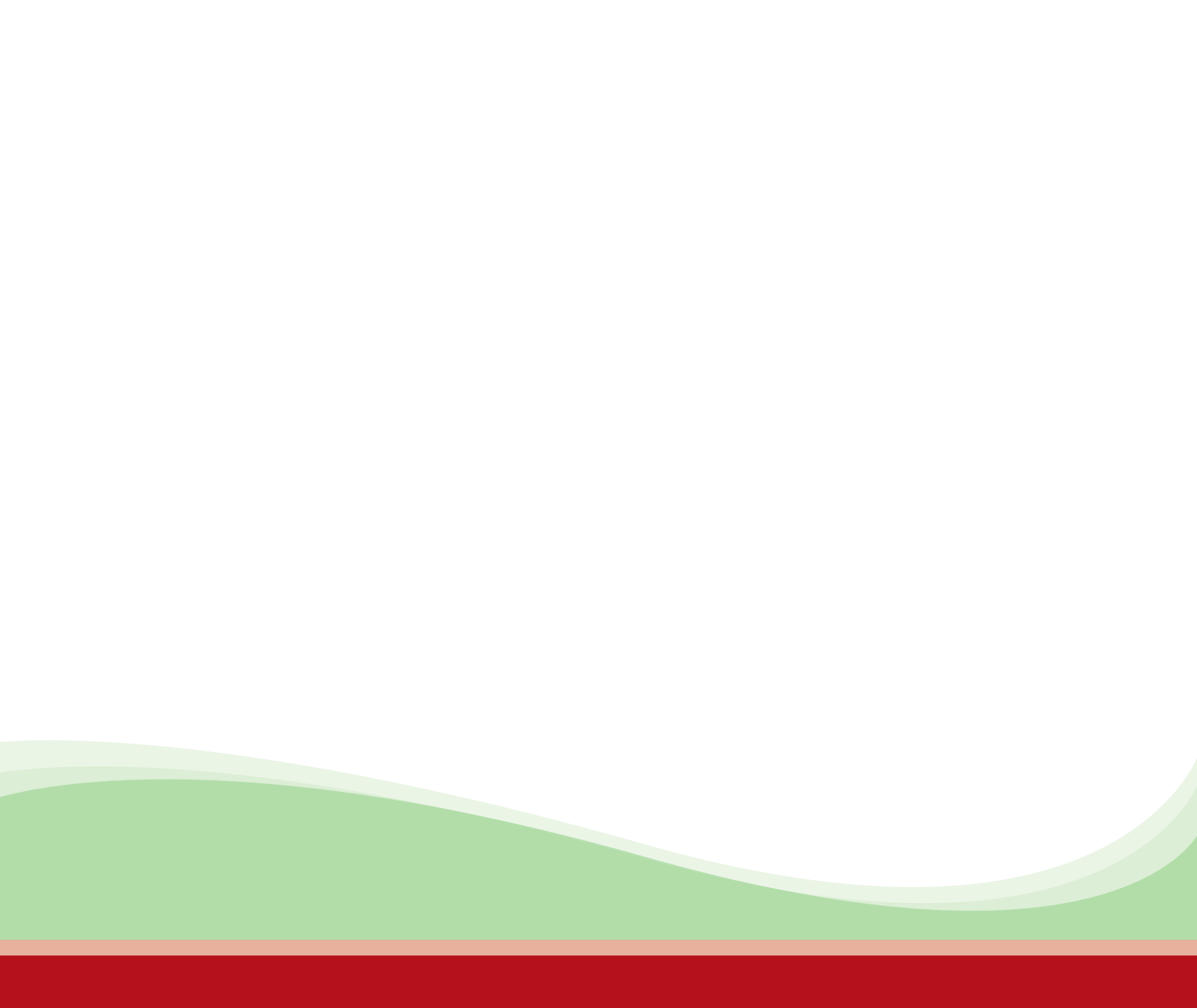




Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence

Celebrating

Ontario's crop of new ideas!
2008



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.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leona Dombrowsky".

Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Premier's Award Winner

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.



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



Peter and Wilma Aarts – Lambton County

Switching to switch grass to heat a 1,500 sow operation has reduced this farm's energy costs and environmental footprint. The farm adapted a high efficiency boiler, typically used in greenhouse operations, designed to burn coal or natural gas to produce heat. The boiler was modified to burn switch grass – a renewable, green energy resource. Within two weeks, the owners no longer needed propane tanks on their farm. They now solely depend on heat generated from the switch grass and predict the high efficiency boiler will help them save up to 80 per cent on their heating bills. This innovation is a greener option that's easy to warm up to.



Berryhill Farm – Lambton County

Berryhill Farm wants its customers to see red. Owners Tony and Joanne Hogervorst have adapted a reusable red basket, modified from the apple industry, to help them market their farm vegetables to local retail grocery chain stores. The basket is a key component of their marketing and delivery system. It's also easy for stores to display. These innovators negotiate directly with individual stores and ensure that their goods are fresher, larger or offer more guarantees than their warehouse counterparts. The farm uses an extensive inventory tracking system and has more than 2,000 baskets in circulation.



Bert Fisher Farms Limited – Perth County

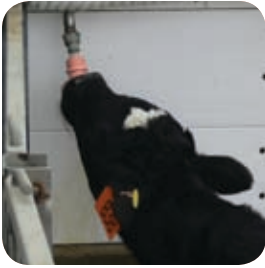
Bert Fisher Farms has responded to a growing market demand for antibiotic-free chickens. In 2007, they began delivering 15,000 birds a week to a national grocer. That demand has since grown to 60,000 birds a week and the farm has filled the bill. Their innovative antibiotic-free management process has seen their birds' seven-day weights increase an average of 40-70 per cent, with some flocks attaining more than five times gain from placement weight. The business also built a commercial research facility and has conducted upwards of 50 trials which have helped to build on and fine-tune its success.



Best Baa Farm – Wellington County

Eric Bzikot counts ideas instead of sheep at night. This innovator has created a value-added venture for his farm that also benefits other producers. A processing plant and a small co-op have been established for the sale of sheep milk product. The co-op currently produces 12 types of artisan sheep cheese, two types of yogurt and is looking at potential in the ice cream market. With distribution to 60 stores and restaurants, Best Baa is creating innovative growth opportunities for Ontario's sheep milk product market.

Regional Award Winners



Lawrence Brubacher – Wellington County

Calves in Wellington County get the royal treatment by having their milk delivered right to them whenever they want it. Lawrence Brubacher spent several months devising an automated system

that includes a heated outdoor tank and pipeline. He knew there had to be a way to save the time it took to manually feed all his calves with buckets. Now, Lawrence is happy, the calves are happy and healthy, and the system may be coming to other farms in Ontario and Canada in the near future.



CIPM Inc. – Hastings County

Profits will be rising along with the dough that comes from flour produced at this milling operation. Patricia Hastings grows heritage grains like Red Fife on 400 acres of land, grinds them and

makes them into a fabulous flour that is then sold to regional grocers, restaurants and bakeries. An initial test marketing of 8 tonnes shows that the product is a hit and can compete well in the marketplace. The vertically-integrated operation improves year-round cash-flow, provides jobs in the off-season, and is doing so well that the company is looking to contract with more grain growers.



Codan Suffolks – Lambton County

Bill and Lynne Duffield are building a better flock using DNA testing from ‘down under.’ Theirs is the first Canadian sheep farm to use this technology pioneered by a New Zealand doctor.

An FTA card, a chemically treated filter paper used to collect and store DNA, is the key factor that enables the farm to send samples to the other side of the world. The farm sends the cards via international courier and results are returned electronically. The program has enabled them to genetically test for cold tolerance and footrot. This has resulted in better breeding decisions and economic returns for the farm.



The County Cider Company – Prince Edward County

In the micro climate of Prince Edward County, apples stay on the branch well into winter. This innovator saw an opportunity to apply the success of ice wine to these apples. After years

of careful research and experimentation, he is turning frozen apples into a delightful new product called “ice cider.” This innovation offers better returns for apple growers and creates more seasonal jobs. Ice cider is unique in Canada because the juice is pressed from apples that are allowed to freeze on the trees. In its first commercial year, it was awarded a gold medal at the Toronto International Wine and Food Show. It’s well-earned recognition for an ‘apple-tizing’ innovation.

Regional Award Winners



County Roots – Food Focus Program, Prince Edward Collegiate Institute – Prince Edward County

Teenagers in Prince Edward County are learning about food from the farm gate to the dinner plate – and some are making money at it. The local high school partnered with 30 different farms and restaurants to develop a four-credit full semester education program for grade 11 and 12 students. Students learn from in-class studies, guest lecturers, five in-depth tours and two three-week stints of on-the-job training. Three students got jobs on local farms as a result. The program is so popular, there is a waiting list for next year.



Debco Ginseng Limited – Norfolk County

Douglas Bradley is ‘mulch’ in demand with an invention that is saving time and money and increasing profits for fellow ginseng growers. Spreading straw mulch on ginseng fields in Ontario used to be an extremely labour-intensive job. It now takes a fraction of the time, and is far less hazardous for workers, thanks to a new piece of equipment pioneered by Bradley. More than 90 per cent of the ginseng grown in Ontario is now mulched using this equipment, and there is a growing market in strawberries.



Diniz Farming Ltd. – Norfolk County

The Diniz Farm went shopping for new ideas at the grocers. This innovator was looking to transition to new crops and approached a grocery store chain to find out what products it might be interested in buying. The grocer was evaluating consumer demand for local foods and identified commodities it was sourcing outside the province. The result was a market breakthrough for locally produced foods. The farm now grows fava beans on a commercial scale and has a new market for its garlic too. It converted its ginseng seed picker to harvest garlic scapes, adapted an onion digger to harvest garlic and modified a ginseng washer for fava beans. Along with a demand for local food, this innovator is also growing new local jobs and new income for the farm.



Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association – Durham Region

The Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association knows how to market good-old-fashioned hospitality. Farmers in Durham region have welcomed as many as 1,500 visitors through the annual weekend Gates Open: Savour Durham Tour, a two-day self-guided tour of 16 farm operations that feature music, food and fun. Visitors sample foods prepared by chefs and enjoy a range of on-farm demonstrations. Eleven restaurants and Bed & Breakfasts also offer local food on their menus during this successful weekend event. This has helped to build longer-term relationships between the business operators and producers. The successful farmer-run program enhances public appreciation for the region, its local food, and the people who produce it.

Regional Award Winners



Enviro Mushroom Farm Inc. – Halton Region

Getting all steamed up means better mushrooms and reduced energy costs at this farm in Halton Region. Steam from two boilers sterilizes the material in which mushrooms are grown. The

wasted heat in the steam and hot water from an auto-clave chamber is recycled to provide energy and heat for the farm. To save more costs, the system was constructed from recycled parts. The mushrooms are moister, the monthly energy bill is down by \$7,000, and business is booming.



Essex County Associated Growers – Essex County

Fruit and vegetable growers in Essex County have built a new ramp onto the information highway, driving consumer traffic to their businesses. The new

website, www.bountyofthecounty.ca, connects consumers, restaurants and retail stores to 1,200 growers who can supply them with fresh, high-quality produce that's grown close to home. Subscribers to the site can also sign up for a Harvest Alert, so they will be notified when products are available.



Ewe Dell Family Farms – Essex County

From farm to family, this innovator has found a way to deliver a product that meets the needs of Ontario's growing diversity of cultures. Ewe Dell Family Farms began as a modest 30 ewe farm.

The operation has grown to include a flock of 4,000 and includes a modern, government inspected abattoir, which was specifically designed to process sheep. The farm markets its lambs directly to a variety of different ethnic clients in a nearby urban centre. The one-of-a-kind abattoir enables the farm to produce specific carcass weights, specialty lamb cuts and products that meet cultural and religious needs of their various customers. This innovative farm has found a new way to honour old traditions.



Featherstone Vineyard – Niagara Region

Featherstone Vineyard deserves a feather in its cap for using nature's balances to safeguard its grape crop. Louise Engel is the first vineyard owner in Ontario to use birds of prey to protect the 23-acre

vineyard from the ravages that small birds can inflict on the grape crop. It's an environmentally sound way of deterring nuisance birds from valuable, high density crops such as grapes, blueberries, raspberries, and cherries. One raptor is capable of controlling up to 50 acres. Engel underwent a required two-year apprenticeship program to become a licensed falconer – an investment of time that is paying dividends in terms of crop protection.

Regional Award Winners



Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company – Prince Edward County

You could say it's the 'big cheese.' Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company is the largest artisan cheese manufacturing facility in Eastern Ontario to process goat

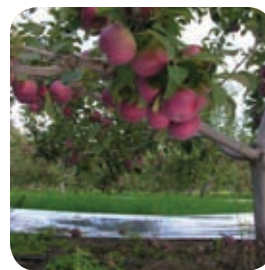
and sheep milk. It's also North America's only certified Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) dairy. This state-of-the-art facility's solar, wind and geothermal technologies have helped reduce its energy consumption by 60 per cent. The dairy's sustainability theme is carried throughout the entire enterprise, from environmentally friendly waste processing to green cleaning agents and biodegradable packaging. The facility has received awards for both its product and its green buildings. The dairy has even built subterranean caves for aging cheese that provide a cool environment with little energy input.



Forager Foods Inc. – Huron County

Forager Foods Inc. offers one-stop shopping with a local flavour. And it's looking to broaden support for Ontario agri-businesses by creating a network of similar stores across southwestern

Ontario. With 21 local and regional food partners currently supplying products to a 900 square-foot retail food specialty store, customers can choose from an array of locally-produced foods. These include meats, deli, artisan cheeses, Lake Huron fish, prepared foods, fresh vegetables and pantry items. Most are grown from within 45 minutes or less of the storefront. The applicant's background as a chef helps consumers pair foods for an enjoyable and regional food experience.



Paul Goddard – Northumberland County

Paul Goddard has found a way to turn sunlight into gold for the apple industry. He developed a foil-like mulch that directs sunlight to the underside of apples. The mulch is applied below

the canopy of apple trees and creates more uniform colouring of the fruit. This helps apple growers meet the high standards demanded by chain retailers who always look for shelf appeal in produce. Through trial and error, Goddard has established the first viable system for broad-based commercial use of this product. The reflective mulch, already adopted by 13 commercial growers, improves yields, enhances quality and helps make Ontario's apple industry more competitive.



Grey Bruce Agriculture and Culinary Association – Grey and Bruce Counties

The whole really is stronger than the sum of its parts when producers, processors, restaurants and tour operators band together to promote

the benefits of local foods. This association now has 157 paid members who are enjoying the increased consumer traffic and profits that come from cross-promotion. Locals and tourists like the convenience of the Buy Local Buy Fresh map, and it helps restaurants coordinate their use of local food.



The Healing Arc Inc. & Everspring Farms Ltd. – Bruce County

Have you tasted the ‘orange of the north’? Sea Buckthorn is a multipurpose, citrus-type berry used in functional foods and for a variety of

medicinal, agronomic and environmental purposes. The fruit is a source of omega 3, 6 and 9 oils and just eight berries provide the daily requirement of vitamin C and beta carotene. Sea Buckthorn can be grown in a wide range of soils, in greenhouses and is drought resistant. After six years of research and development, the growers are now selling cuttings to private and commercial sectors in Ontario and Quebec. These innovators have helped introduce the crop to Ontario and are continually working to educate consumers on its ‘berry-good’ merits.



Hillside Gardens Limited – Simcoe County

Ron Gleason is helping to strengthen the gate-to-plate connection. He redesigned an existing software program for use as a farm traceability program. It’s capable of tracing all field activities from

harvest, to packing, to shipping dates and destinations. 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.



Hilton Soy Foods – Perth County

Thousands of Canadians suffer from life-threatening nut allergies and many schools ban peanut butter from the classroom. Consumers are demanding more peanut-free products. Hilton

Soy Foods is answering the call. This innovator has created a soy product that tastes like peanut butter. Their product, Soy Butter, has won several taste tests and is being used by various manufacturers to develop new nut-free products. Caterers for children’s camps and schools are also asking suppliers to carry this product. This innovation has benefited soybean farmers, created new jobs and market opportunities in the processing sector and offers peace of mind to consumers.



Howell Family Pumpkin Farm – Niagara Region

You could call Jerry Howell the Walt Disney of his community. Howell has spent more than 30 years pursuing his childhood dream of growing the best pumpkins, while innovating and

marketing agri-tourism that includes both education and a fun farm experience. Visitors delight in animal petting areas and an array of animated shows and displays. The farm’s ‘Rex, the pumpkin eating dinosaur’ is one of the unique innovations that has been adopted by others, and the farm’s ‘singing chickens’ have been commercialized and sold to more than 30 farm-based attractions in Canada. Howell Family Pumpkin Farm employs four full-time and 76 seasonal employees who help give families an entertaining and educational experience on the farm.

Regional Award Winners



Kawartha Ecological Growers (KEG) – Kawartha Lakes County

KEG keeps farmers in Kawartha on the road to sustainability by providing them with a distribution service that allows them to concentrate on farming. Four

times a week, KEG runs one vehicle loaded with local products from 15 farms to more than 30 Toronto restaurants and butcher shops. KEG saves the environment, increases business and plans to add more farms to increase the volume and variety on offer. Sales tripled between 2006 and 2008. In 2008, KEG also started a Community Shared Agriculture program that now has 160 members in the greater Toronto area.



Joe Kerr – Lambton County

This farmer is a friend to the environment. After some experimentation, Joe Kerr has established a simple combination of drainage fittings that effectively

collect and supply water to wetland, without compromising his field drainage system. To date, 20 acres of farmland has been modified with this new technology. This innovation is a ‘win-win’ as it allows wildlife to enjoy the wetland while the farmer saves money. It’s a great example of environmental stewardship that benefits the business of agriculture.



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



Naturpack Ltd. – Chatham-Kent County

Naturpack is a durable, lightweight and greener loose-fill packaging material made from unmodified corn starch. This product is manufactured without chemicals and is 100 per cent

biodegradable, making it an excellent alternative to Styrofoam packing. By adapting German technology, this innovator has modified the process to produce an environmentally-friendly packaging product that can be widely used and presents an alternative use for corn. The innovation is the only product in North America that uses the patented extrusion process and raw material combination. Naturpack is a great example that shows us how agriculture can produce greener products and help shrink our environmental footprint.



Norfolk County Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS Pilot) – Norfolk County

ALUS is greening agriculture in Norfolk County. ALUS, or Alternative Land Use Services, compensates farmers for putting in place environmentally sound

practices. It is voluntary, developed by farmers, and has achieved impressive results. Funds were raised from foundations, wildlife groups and government agencies to formally launch this pilot project. Twenty-eight farmers have active projects that range from planting trees and tall grasses on marginal farmland to preserving wetlands for bird habitat. And word is spreading. Nearly 700 people have toured demonstration farms. This program serves as a model that could be expanded across the province.



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.



Oakridge Acres Country Meat Store – Waterloo Region

Oakridge Acres Country Meat Store is not your typical little country corner shop. Owners Mark and Cindy Gerber started out by setting up a country

produce store for 40 area farms. It didn't take long for their sales to grow exponentially. They sell their Black Angus beef in their new 3,000-square-foot store, as well as a full range of food products from neighbouring farms. An in-store kitchen provides value-added products that feature local farm ingredients. Customers can also shop online. These innovators have actively marketed through farm open houses and networking at health and wellness-themed events, building a growing roster of health professionals who endorse the store's products to clients.

Regional Award Winners



Ontario Farm Animal Council – Wellington County

Do you want “the real dirt on farming”? The Ontario Farm Animal Council offers a booklet under the same name, just one of the many creative materials it has developed over the past 20 years

to promote agricultural awareness. The Council continuously finds innovative ways to tell the story of Ontario’s farmers. Almost 100,000 visitors have accessed its “Virtual Farm Tours” with a click of their computer mouse. People also enjoy the “Faces of Farming” calendar, sold out each year. The non-profit education organization is a leader in developing resources and participating in events that help educate and raise awareness of Ontario’s agri-food sector.



Ontario Lamb Improvement Breeding Strategy Replicating Breeder’s Association – Peterborough County

Recognizing that Ontario consumers have consistently demanded twice as much home grown Ontario lamb as the

industry has been capable of supplying, this innovator developed a standardized systems approach to produce large numbers of uniform sheep breeding stock. This has helped the operation grow from a flock of 200 ewes to more than 2,400 in eight years. In addition to developing the system, a marketing strategy has also evolved which is helping to educate commercial sheep producers who are interested in growing their breeding stock and maximizing their bottom line.



Ontario Water Buffalo Company – Hastings County

Milking a water buffalo is easier than you think. The animal produces milk that is high in fat and protein and very easy to digest. Martin Littkemann and Lori Smith are red Angus farmers who

looked at water buffalo as a way to increase their farm’s income. They now own the first water buffalo milking operation in Ontario. These innovators have established protocols to develop an Ontario water buffalo milking industry that could one day supply national consumer demand. They have landed a contract to supply a specialty cheese factory in Toronto, and plan to market their buffalo meat to high end restaurants. A great example of niche marketing that is paying dividends.



Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative – Renfrew County

The connections are electronic, but the food is real, tasty and fresh in Renfrew County, where a web-based catalogue of local foods allows members to order

online and pick-up their goods at a convenient location in their community. The Ottawa Valley Food Co-op’s efficient order, collection and redistribution system helps consumer members connect easily with local producers. As a result, there is more food being purchased from local producers which keeps the local economy humming. The co-op’s membership continues to grow, with 190 consumers, 29 of whom are also producers, offering more than 370 different products.

Regional Award Winners



Palatine Fruit & Roses – Niagara Region

A rose is a rose by any other name – unless it is a special, disease resistant rose adapted to Ontario conditions. Rene and Eva Schmitz of Palatine Fruit and Roses meticulously tested

and propagated three different lines of roses for this purpose. They recognized that there was a gap in the local market for roses that would be more resistant to blackspot, mildew and rust. Their work blossomed into their ‘Vigorosa’, ‘Fairy Tale’ and ‘Climbing Max’ rose lines which are sure to be in demand for public and private gardens.



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.



Quinte Organic Farmers Cooperative Inc. – Hastings and Northumberland Counties

This group of certified organic farmers recognizes there’s strength in numbers. They pool their resources and work together to achieve efficiencies in

marketing and production. The nine members of the cooperative share knowledge, experience and expertise with each other and coordinate their production and marketing efforts. The cooperative brings local farmers together and provides local, organic food to the community. These innovators actively promote the co-op approach at farm shows, conferences and local farm meetings. They also plan to introduce an apprentice-mentorship program to help give young and new farmers a low-cost entrance into farming and marketing. Farmers helping farmers – it’s an innovative twist to a trusted tradition.



Saugeen Country Dairy – Grey County

If you have a yearning for yogurt, this farm’s for you. At Saugeen Country Dairy, the owners operate both a certified organic dairy farm and an on-farm dairy. It is the first on-farm

dairy in Ontario to make and sell organic yogurt, which it has been doing since 1994. This yogurt has a short list of ingredients with all the milk produced on the farm. And it has been profitable. After 14 years of steady sales growth they process more than 300,000 litres and employ three full-time and five part-time staff.

Regional Award Winners



Jim Shea – Huron County

Jim Shea gets a real lift out of his innovative invention. With a metal cage, a hydraulic jack, and an extendable post, the Non-Kick Jack Cage makes farm equipment repair and construction jobs safer than they used to be. The

engineering marvel reduces the danger of the jack kicking sideways under extreme pressure. Whether it's the corner of a barn or the wagon, this invention is definitely up to the job.



Sim Farms Ltd. – Lambton County

Simon VanAert had an 'egg-cellent' idea. He designed a simple but effective egg trap that captures eggs laid in the feeding system of modern, free range poultry buildings. An aluminum bar

directs the eggs into a holding tray until they can be retrieved. This has created numerous cost savings for the operation. The trap eliminates breakage of premium organic/free-range eggs dropping into the fresh food conveyor belt and increases saleable eggs and productivity.



Sandy and Kathy Smith – Middlesex County

No one has to say 'where's the beef?' in Middlesex County. It's been conveniently cooked and vacuum-packed in a tasty gravy, ready to heat for dinner. The roast comes from beef

born, raised and finished on Sandy and Kathy Smith's farm. After it goes to the local butcher, the meat is cooked and packaged locally. The Smiths market and sell their product to local food establishments. Their innovation meets consumer demand for quick, easy and nutritious meals. It saves the environment by reducing transportation costs, and boosts the farmers' and butchers' bottom lines, while supporting the local economy.



Spring Arbour Farm – Norfolk County

How would you like your groceries delivered fresh from the farm – straight to your door? Spring Arbour Farm does just that by supplying fresh organic food to more than 100 families in Norfolk

County region. Families who wish to become members of this co-operative provide a deposit which is used to cover spring start-up costs. This farm works on a local food premise, buying crops from neighbouring farms to build their inventory. It's a low cost, low risk entry into farming which can start small and scale up quickly. Happy farmers and happy customers share the benefits of this innovative farm management and local food marketing approach.

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.



Sunrise Produce – Simcoe County

The chips are never down at Sunrise Produce. The farm's experienced potato breeders and growers, Peter and Carla VanderZaag, have developed three new potato varieties that can be made into

the popular snack all year-round. Most other chipping varieties maintain their quality for only two to three months. The three innovative potato lines can be processed any time, from the moment they are placed in storage until the following summer. The new varieties were officially registered in 2007 and have been adopted by other producers. Last year, 300 acres of the new varieties were grown in Ontario. There is significant market growth potential for these potatoes, including in the United States.



Sunsation Acres Inc. – Essex County

It's food safety first for Jim Slater of Sunsation Acres Incorporated. Jim is an early adopter of a rigorous food safety regimen that the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers have

made mandatory for their members. The process includes documenting daily practices, strict employee hygiene and stringent water quality and pest control programs. In the future, every producer, packer and marketer of Ontario greenhouse tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers will have their food safety program verified annually by a third party audit firm, and buyers will be able to verify that these products are grown under the safest conditions possible.



VandenBorre Fruit Farms – Elgin County

You can put away the ladders at this apple orchard. Maurice VandenBorre designed a self-propelled apple harvesting unit that can pick, prune or thin multiple rows of apple trees,

even in inclement weather. The hydraulic unit has proven its efficiency for 20 years and has attracted many Canadian and international visitors. This innovation eliminates the need for operators to run up and down ladders. Less jostling of both the operator and fruit results in fewer bruised apples and elbows. The unit has helped speed up harvesting and is used by the farm seven months of the year.

Regional Award Winners



Vandermeer Greenhouses Ltd. – Niagara Region

Flowers are set to bloom under grape power at Vandermeer Greenhouses Ltd. These innovative growers will be the first in Ontario to fill their anaerobic digester with grape pomace, the waste material

left over from winemaking. The growers have also adapted a corn silage storage system to house the pomace before it goes into the digester. They anticipate that this free, organic waste material will power their entire greenhouse, and produce excess power that can be sold to the grid. By using grape pomace, this grower is squeezing the most out of an opportunity to save thousands of dollars in heating costs – and generate green power that benefits the environment.



Vicki's Veggies – Prince Edward County

There's nothing old about Tim Noxon and Vicki Emlaw's attitude to heirloom organic vegetables. Besides growing and selling the produce at a roadside stand, they run a Community Shared Agriculture

program, have an heirloom seedling sale and supply restaurants. All this on eight-and-a-half acres of vegetables and four acres of gardens. Old is new again with the increased interest in heirloom produce. Business is good and growing with profits quadrupling between 2004 and 2007.



Vinifera For Life Canada/ Southbrook Wineries – Niagara Region

Mark Walpole is squeezing every ounce of profit out of his grapes and more, with a patented process that takes the usually-wasted grape skins

and pulp from wine-making and makes them into healthy food supplements and skin care ingredients. The Vinifera powders have so much nutritional and flavour value that both Novus International (an animal feed company) and L'Oreal Paris Cosmetics have shown interest in incorporating it into their products. To top it all off, the process significantly reduces disposal costs and protects the environment.



Wendy's Mobile Market – Leeds and Grenville County

Wendy Banks takes the local food movement seriously, which is why she is always on the move, providing door-to-door delivery of locally grown products. The development of a user

friendly website listing local products from more than 35 local producers allows consumers, including many local restaurants, bed and breakfasts and individuals to conveniently place their orders. Just a year into the operation, business is very good. She recently added a retail location in response to consumer demand for local food.

Regional Award Winners



Wholesome Pickins – Norfolk County

David and Jennifer VanDeVelde's idea for converting their tobacco farm is bearing fruit and incomes well beyond their expectations. By planting ever-bearing strawberries and raspberries, and retrofitting the equipment they already had, these innovative growers built a business that has three part-time student employees and several part-time and full-time labourers. In 2008, they saw a 45-percent, year-over-year increase in customer traffic. The VanDeVeldes are looking at an even bigger 2009 with a new website, radio and print advertising, and more outdoor signs.



Windblest Farm – Lanark County

Janice and Bryan Lever are not sheepish about the success they have made of what was supposed to be a retirement project. Windblest Farm is a beautiful place located close to Ferguson Falls in Lanark County where the Levers sell their own tweed – a unique three-ply worsted weight knitting yarn in five colours. They have developed their own washing system and a fabric wash sac for wool. The farm employs a high school student during the summer and at shearing time, which helps them deliver the goods – from 'sheep to shawl.'



WoolDrift Farm – Grey County

WoolDrift Farm, the first commercial sheep milking operation in the province, has shepherded the growth of Ontario's sheep milk industry. Owners Chris Buschbeck and Axel Meister were the first to import East Friesian dairy sheep embryos into Canada and continuously improved the genetics of the flock, resulting in sales across North America. These innovators have been instrumental in founding the Ontario Dairy Sheep Association and have attracted farmers to the sheep milk market through various educational symposiums and workshops. Today, more than 50 Ontario farmers are milking sheep commercially, producing 1.5 million litres of milk which is poured into artisan cheeses, yogurt, ricotta and feta cheese.

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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