



News Release

For immediate release

WINNERS OF THE 2008 CANADIAN AGRI-FOOD AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE ANNOUNCED

TORONTO, Ontario, November 10, 2008 – Be it an environmental family who wants to protect bees; a scientist who is creating innovative flax products; a team who creates outreach projects that profile farmers to urban Canadians; an inspirational 25-year-old woman who took over the family farm; or a group of Prairie women who promote rural living, this Government is committed to honouring those who show excellence in Canadian agriculture.

Today, a number of outstanding Canadians were honoured with the presentation of the 2008 Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence. The awards ceremony was co-hosted by Dr. Rob McLaughlin, President of the Royal Agriculture Winter Fair and Guy Lauzon, Member of Parliament for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry on behalf of the Honourable Gerry Ritz, Federal Agriculture Minister.

“It just goes to prove, once again, that the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry is the best in the world,” said Mr. Lauzon. “These awards recognize outstanding achievement in the sector and I congratulate the winners for their notable achievements.”

This is the eighth annual Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence, co-sponsored by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The awards recognize outstanding achievements and leadership in six categories: voluntarism, youth leadership, innovation, agri-food export, environmental stewardship and agricultural awareness and education.

“I’m proud to see the scope of the creativity, innovation and inventiveness represented by these worthy award winners,” said Dr. Rob McLaughlin. “The Royal is proud to showcase such excellent Canadian talent and innovation.”

The 2008 award recipients are:

- Voluntarism – Southwest Farm Women’s Network, Manitoba
- Youth Leadership – Carmina Halstead, Ontario
- Innovation – Natunola Health Inc., Ontario
- Agri-Food Export – Peak of the Market, Manitoba
- Environmental Stewardship – Cathy and Bryan Gilvesy, Y U Ranch, Ontario
- Agricultural Awareness and Education – Ontario Farm Animal Council’s public outreach projects

Further information on the 2008 winners can be found in the attached backgrounder or visit www.agr.gc.ca/awards.



-2-

For more information, please contact:

Media Relations

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
613-759-7972
1-866-345-7972

Margaux Stastny

Press Secretary
The Office of the Honourable Gerry Ritz
613-759-1059

Emily Miller

Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Toronto
416-263-3411



BACKGROUND

Award of Excellence for Voluntarism – Southwest Farm Women’s Network

The agriculture industry can engage consumers in many ways. Some organizations rely on fancy advertisements or eloquent presentations to reach their audiences, but the volunteer-run Southwest Farm Women’s Network cuts the sizzle, and serves the steak. They take people to the real places where agriculture happens.

The Southwest Farm Women’s Network helps rural women face challenges within their families, communities and the agriculture industry.

Their main activity is a bus tour that promotes agriculture by exploring the nooks and crannies in Southwest Manitoba. Tour participants have visited vacation farms, meat processors, wild bird sanctuaries, a foundry, local artists, grain elevators, Hutterite colonies and all types of livestock operations. Since the network’s creation 23 years ago, many tour participants have made lifelong friendships with people they have met along the way.

The Southwest Farm Women’s Network is almost entirely volunteer-run but the core group is nine women from Southwest Manitoba and three staff from the Manitoba provincial government.

The network takes a very modest and humble approach to their work, yet the enrichment they bring to their community through promoting agriculture warrants great recognition.

Award of Excellence for Youth Leadership – Carmina Halstead

Carmina Halstead is not your average 25-year old! Not only does she co-own one of Canada’s largest local suppliers to Ontario food chain retailers, she is also a regional director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and an active director of the Norfolk Federation of Agriculture. In fact, she is their youngest director to date!

Carmina’s involvement with her Delhi, Ontario, family farm’s business began at a very young age, when she held the key position of “carton-folder” for produce grown on the farm. Led by her family’s philosophy that farm work and business planning are a family affair, Carmina set some ambitious goals for herself, and pursued them through studies at the University of Guelph and McMaster University.

Today, Carmina and her brother, Bill, operate Nightingale Farms and Norfolk Organics, in LaSalette, Ontario, where they focus on locally grown and organic produce. Their company supplies produce to Ontario food chain retailers, independents, Ontario Food Terminal brokers, and numerous retailers in the United States. It is Carmina’s hope that next year they will be the first to establish an innovative distribution centre specifically for organic foods and carry these products for year-round distribution.

Carmina combines her education and professionalism with a holistic and hands-on approach to provide an exemplary leadership style.



Award of Excellence for Innovation in Agriculture and Agri-Food – Natunola Health Inc.

Flaxseed is one of the richest sources of Omega-3 fatty acids, which enhance health. But whole flaxseed is indigestible until its hull is removed, making it a difficult product to both market and store.

That has now changed, thanks to the efforts of Natunola Health Inc. of Winchester, Ontario. Under the leadership of Dr. Nam Fong Han, the company has built the world's first commercial dehulling plant for flaxseed.

In the past two years, Natunola has developed and sold a range of new flax products such as flax kernel and flax extracts, all of which are gluten free, kosher certified and free of preservatives. In addition, these products are shelf stable and require no grinding or refrigeration. A number of new retail products are using ingredients from Natunola.

In two years the company has grown from four to 22 employees and has seen its profits rise considerably. It has also helped establish two new private companies: Step Hill Solution Inc., which focuses on the human health food sector, and Equine Essentials Canada, which focuses on equine care.

This all-Canadian company is indeed providing new opportunities for Canada's flax growers. It is also adding value and health benefits by offering innovative new products for the human food, personal care and animal care markets.

Award of Excellence for Agri-Food Export – Peak of the Market

Many consumers are happy to buy high-quality Canadian vegetables. It's not always obvious, however, which vegetables in your supermarket are produced in Canada. Manitoba's Peak of the Market does away with this dilemma. All of their vegetables are grown, washed and packaged by Canadian farmers.

As one of Canada's fastest growing produce exporters, this company defines wholesome quality and freshness. They achieve this through careful attention to ordinary consumers as well as to their business clients.

Larry McIntosh, the company's president and C.E.O., goes to great lengths to provide strong service to his domestic and international clients. If Larry cannot visit personally, he often sends a sales associate to work with that client.

Over the past four years, Peak of the Market has expanded into the organic market and has also recently introduced a popular new potato variety called Adora.

The company's dedication to exporting high-quality products and strong customer service has helped consistently expand its market share and sales figures. Over the past two years, their shipping volume has increased by over 90 per cent, and sales have grown by over 80 per cent.



At a time when transportation costs and a high Canadian dollar have hampered exports, Peak of the Market continues to show steady growth. This company is proof that nice guys can finish ahead of the pack.

Award of Excellence for Environmental Stewardship – Cathy and Bryan Gilvesy, Y U Ranch

Doing things differently comes naturally to Norfolk farmers Cathy and Bryan Gilvesy, who have transformed their former tobacco fields into an eco-conscious farm where Texas Longhorn cattle now roam.

The Gilvesys' are passionate ambassadors about the environmental benefits provided by farmers. They believe that farmers have an important role in providing wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration services, clean water and healthier food for Canadians. Their farm, known as Y U Ranch, is known as an eco-tour destination and the family also markets their own grass-fed beef.

Over the past 14 years, the farm has been a model of sustainability, where everything has a dual purpose. They have planted native grasses that provides wildlife habitat, sequesters carbon and provides a food source for their cattle in times of drought. An innovative pollinator hedgerow has been planted from native flowering tree and legume species that provide food and housing for declining native bees species. The hedgerow will provide microclimate benefits together with free pollination services for adjacent field crops. Several dozen bluebird boxes house the grassland species that provide insect control for the cattle. The managed forest cools and buffers a cold water stream for trout.

It is Gilvesys' 'whole farm' approach to the environment that has led to such innovations. Their farm is an official Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) demonstration farm, which is a farmer-led pilot project that leads stewardship efforts.

Award of Excellence for Agricultural Awareness and Education – Ontario Farm Animal Council's public outreach projects

A calendar that features real farm families, a booklet about agriculture, and a series of virtual tours about life on the farm are just a few of the initiatives developed by the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) to help promote agriculture.

For the past 20 years OFAC has helped dispel inaccurate notions of farming and food production. It is often called upon by organizations to help deal with concerns related to animal care, food safety and the environment. The continued popularity and growing demand for their outreach efforts are proof of their success in bridging the gap between farmers and the public. OFAC has become recognized as a credible and knowledgeable voice for the livestock and poultry farmers and agribusinesses in Canada.

OFAC has an outstanding record for outreach projects and activities such as curriculum materials for schools, publications, videos, public speaking, information displays, and an interactive website containing a wide range of tools and products.



For example, in 2006 OFAC created the award winning booklet “The Real Dirt on Farming.” The first 15,000 copies sold out in three weeks. To date, more than 90,000 copies have been distributed to classrooms, health care professionals, media outlets and politicians. OFAC’s “Faces of Farming” calendar sells out year after year and generates over 40 good news stories in the media each year. The internet-based Virtual Farm Tours allow consumers to tour 17 Ontario farms and had 2 million hits in 2007.

OFAC continues to promote agriculture with new initiatives such as the upcoming FarmzOnWheelz project, a travelling exhibit and video presentation to introduce agriculture to the urban teen audience.