



Announcing ... the 2010 Outstanding Young Farmers for Ontario

(Guelph, ON – April 1, 2010) “We produce a wide variety of the best quality vegetables using sustainable and organic farming practices.” Those words sum up the goal of the 2010 Ontario Outstanding Young Farmers, Steve and Lisa Cooper. The Coopers of Coopers CSA and Maze near Zephyr, south of Lake Simcoe in Durham Region, received the top honour at the provincial awards ceremony held in Belleville on Tuesday March 30th. Dairy Goat farmers, Anthony and Marj Sjaarda from Wyoming, received runner-up recognition. Winners of the award are chosen based on career progress; environmental and safety practices; crop and livestock production history; financial and management practices; and contributions to society.

The Coopers were chosen from a group of six farmers including Matt Fischer (Fischer Family Poultry, Listowel), Hugh and Arlene Hunter (Maple-Ain Dairy Farm, Smith Falls), Amy Strom (Strom’s Sweet Corn and Pumpkins, Guelph), Anthony and Marg Sjaarda (Sjaarda Caprine Farms, Wyoming) and Katie Normet, (River’s Edge Goat Dairy, Arthur). For information on all of the finalists, visit the OOF website at www.oofontario.ca.

The judges, Brian Little (retired from RBC), Jack Gilliland (retired from John Deere) and Tom VanDusen (agricultural journalist) chose the Coopers in part due to their innovative and customer-oriented ideas.

Steve and Lisa’s story began after meeting at the Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph. Upon graduation, they took over the running of a family cattle and sweet corn business. They quickly realized that weather, low commodity prices and a diminishing cattle market were not going to provide them with financial stability and meet their desire to farm full-time. In the late 1990’s they put in a market garden and delved into direct marketing helping to begin Farmers’ Markets now available in Newmarket, Aurora, Uxbridge, Gravenhurst and Oshawa. In 2000 the cattle were sold and replaced with meat goats, and the cropping end of the farm was altered into an on-farm store and later an agri-entertainment area with a corn maze, kid’s play area and fall festival and even more recently an expanded pick-your-own section.

In 2007, the Coopers entered into a Community Shared Agriculture program for the marketing of their fruits and vegetables. 50 families signed up and paid to receive a weekly basket of vegetables for 20 weeks. In 2008, this was expanded to 235 families from all across the GTA. They continue to expand this aspect of their farm with the building of a small greenhouse and planting late spinach and greens in order to extend the growing season and now deliver food 23 weeks of the year. They have also added pasture beef and pasture raised broiler chickens to the product list. Their farm and products have been certified by Local Food Plus and over the last ten years, they have been able to reduce their pesticide use by over 75%.

Steve contributes part of their success to “being on the right side of a trend.” “We were really lucky to have had a business that we could quickly expand when the local food movement started to gain momentum”.

As with many successful young farmers, Steve and Lisa understand that education and networking are critical to their success. They are both graduates of the Advanced Agricultural

Leadership Program and have also completed the George Morris Centre's C-Team program for farm business managers. They also volunteer time to local farm organizations, and Farmers' markets, and several minor sports teams. They are also committed to spending as much time as possible with their two children, Cayla and Trenton who are both starting to take an active role in the operation.

Over 150 people were on hand at the awards banquet to celebrate with all of the finalists.

John Steele, Co-chair of the 2010 event noted that "the pride that these finalists had in their operations, and the love they had for their communities was very infectious. Spending time with such imaginative and successful young farmers reminds us all that farming is a rewarding occupation and we need to keep that in mind more as we deal with our daily challenges."

To be eligible for the Outstanding Young Farmer award, farmers must be between 19 and 39 years of age, derive at least two thirds of their annual income from farming and demonstrate progress in their agriculture careers. Nominations for the 2011 award will open in September 2010.

Steve and Lisa will now represent Ontario at the National competition being held from November 23-18 in Victoria, British Columbia, where they will compete with other farmers from across Canada for the title of Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers.

The 2010 event was sponsored by Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited, TD Canada Trust, Syngenta, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Conservation Ontario, Better Farming and GROWMARK.

The national competition is sponsored by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Bayer Crop Science, CIBC and John Deere.

- 30 -

For more information contact:
Karen Daynard (Ontario Coordinator)
Phone: (519) 836-2583
Fax: (519) 836-1733
Email: kdaynard@sympatico.ca
Website: www.oyfontario.ca