

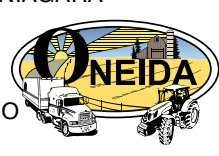




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Bench winery receives nod as top winery in Ontario

**WineAlign awards honour
The Organized Crime
Winery with coveted
distinction**

By Luke Edwards

He could have been a grape grower, or he could have been a winemaker. Instead, Greg Yemen chose option three: Both.

While his job at The Organized Crime Winery on the Beamsville Bench is technically winemaker, the Niagara College grad's job takes him out into the vineyard just as much as it does inside the winery. That's because he and owners, the husband and wife team of Ania De Duleba and Edward Zaski, have a belief that good wine starts well before the grapes find their way indoors.

"If you don't have good, ripe grapes, you don't have good wine. You can't fix that in the winery," Yemen said.

That theory seems to have some merit, since the winery took home this year's award as the top Ontario winery at the WineAlign awards, finishing above Niagara-on-the-Lake's Peller Estates winery and nearby Fielding Estate Winery, which finished second and third, respectively.

The winery has been among the top finishers at the competition previously, and De Duleba said they know their "small but mighty" winery has been pushing out high quality wines for several years now. However, since they're quite small she said Organized Crime can sometimes get overlooked.

"We know we do good wine here, but I think our thing is that we're really underrated," she said.

"Sometimes people don't realize the calibre of our wines."

Despite previous top finishes and confidence in what Yemen is producing, De Duleba said there was some surprise when the awards were handed out. For starters, finishing above so many other quality wineries is never a given. It also came as a bit of a surprise that their chardonnay took second fiddle to a wine not commonly associated with the Bench.

Instead, the winery received its second ever platinum award thanks to its 2022 Bordeaux blend they call "The Download."

"We're told a lot that we can't grow good Bordeaux reds on the Bench, you know, save that for the Lakeshore or the Niagara River. But I think (2022) was a very classic Bench year. A very good level of ripeness, not overripe, not underripe, just perfectly ripe. Which



The talent and terroir of the Beamsville Bench is evident in this road sign near The Organized Crime Winery, which includes several wineries that have received top honours at the WineAlign awards in the past. ~ Luke Edwards photo

doesn't happen very often," said Yemen.

The chardonnays weren't totally forgotten, though, with the winery's 2022 and 2023 Sacred Series Cuvee Krystyna wines winning gold medals. Their 2022 and 2023 Limestone Block chardonnays, 2022 Break-In pinot noir, and 2024 rose also won golds to go along with four silvers and three bronze winning wines.

De Duleba said the WineAlign awards are the only competitions they enter, in part because their blind testing puts wineries big and small on an equal footing. She also said it's important to enter some competitions as it gives them a benchmark to compare themselves to.

She and Zaski took over the winery from De Duleba's mom and step dad, Jan and Krystyna Tarasewicz right as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In fact, De Duleba said they were set to put their Toronto home on the market the day Premier Doug Ford shut everything down in Ontario.

It had never been their plan to take over - both had successful careers in Toronto - but things changed a few years earlier when Krystyna lost a long and hard fought battle with cancer. De Duleba began commuting down from Toronto to help out at the winery.

Krystyna and Jan opened the winery in 2007, after purchasing the property in 1999. The name may evoke thoughts of goodfellas and godfathers, but it's actually a play on an actual event that took place in the area. De Duleba said way back in the early 1900s there were two Jordan Mennonite churches.

"One of the churches decided to get a pipe organ and started

playing it in their church. And the other Mennonite community was offended by it. They thought it was sinful, evil, and prideful. (The second church thought) you're only supposed to use your voice in the church," De Duleba said.

"So the men, in the dead of the night, drove over there, broke in, stole the pipe organ, loaded it onto their buggies, took it down to the Twenty Mile embankment in Jordan and the chucked it down the ravine."

Hence the name The Organized Crime Winery.

At the time Jan and Krystyna purchased the property it was an old orchard filled mostly with dead and dying pear trees. They built the vineyards and winery from scratch, with Zaski and De Duleba helping when they could.

They began planting vines in 2000 and made their first wine in 2006, before opening as a winery the following year. Between her help during those years and several Wine and Spirit Education Trust courses she took, De Duleba had a decent understanding of what it took to run a wine business.

However, it still took a few years after her mom died for the family to decide how to proceed. Ultimately she and Zaski opted to purchase it from her dad.

They did make some changes when they took over. One of the biggest was hiring Glen Elgin Vineyard Management to help out in the vineyards. While they continue to do a lot of work in-house, having Glen Elgin come in at crucial times has helped improve quality and production of the vineyards, De Duleba said.

Even with that help and her background, De Duleba said the

Continued to page A4 →

Front page photo: The Organized Crime Winery in Beamsville won the award for top Ontario winery at the 2025 WineAlign National Wine Awards. In the photo, from left: Owners Ania De Duleba and Edward Zaski, and winemaker Greg Yemen.. ~ Luke Edwards photo



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Organized Crime pulls off biggest win at WineAlign awards

→ **Continued from page A3**

learning curve was extremely steep, and running the winery continues to be a job that requires a ton of devotion.

“Everyone has this idea that it’s like this bucolic lifestyle and we’re skipping in the vineyard with a glass of wine. And they don’t realize that, at the end of the day, we’re farmers, first and foremost,” she said.

And as farmers, she said they maintain a healthy respect for the land. They aren’t organic and do use sprays, but De Duleba said they use other efforts to minimize how much spray is needed. Those efforts include keeping the grass between the vines neatly cut, pulling the leaves off and keeping grapes separated to maximize air flow and reduce the likelihood of disease.

And about 90 per cent of their harvest is done by hand, a grueling job but one that allows them to ensure only the best grapes get turned into wine.

They dedicated a block of chardonnay to De Duleba’s mom, calling it the Cuvee Krystyna. It only made sense for it to be chardonnay.

“We named it after my mom because when you came to the winery, she would make you drink chardonnay whether you liked it or not,” De Duleba recalled fondly.

“So we thought it would be appropriate to name it after her. She loved chardonnay...And we feel it’s Niagara’s best grape, in terms of wine.”

It was from those grapes that Organized Crime won its first platinum award back in 2017.

They also have a block of pinot noir dedicated to Jan.

“His last name is Tarasewicz, which is unpronounceable, so we shortened it to Tara,” De Duleba said.

The winery has essentially maxed out what they can do on the 40 acres of land they call home. They have about 25 acres under vine, though there is a small patch in the front of the property that De Duleba said could be used to plant more vines. They pulled out the gewurztraminer vines that were previously in the field because they weren’t surviving the winters too well.

Otherwise, De Duleba said the plan is largely to keep doing what they’re doing to produce well made, handcrafted and artisanal wine. One goal is to get more of their wine into the LCBO, which remains the key space for consumers.

Niagara made a clean sweep in the top Ontario wineries category at the WineAlign awards. The Okanagan Valley’s Mission Hill Family



Winners of this year’s top Ontario winery award at the WineAlign National Wine Awards, The Organized Crime winery is “small but mighty,” owner Ania De Duleba said. ~ Luke Edwards photo

Estate won the top winery in the country award.

Inniskillin’s 2023 Riesling icewine got top honours in the icewine category and received a platinum award.

Other Niagara wineries that took home platinum awards included: Black Bank Hill for its 2022 cabernet franc, Byland Estate Winery for its 2023 Riesling icewine, Fielding Estate for its 2023 cabernet franc, Niagara College for its 2022 Dean’s List cabernet franc,

Nomad at Hinterbrook Winery for its 2021 Wanderlust, Palatine Hills for its 2024 Ramblers Schmoozer cabernet merlot, Peller Estates for its 2023 Signature Series Riesling, Thirty Bench for its 2022 Small Lot Riesling Triangle Vineyard, and two from Trius: the 2022 Grand Red and 2023 Showcase Riesling Ghost Creek Vineyard.

All the awards, and more information, can be found at winealign.com. 🌱



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Grape King reflects on role as reign comes to an end

Advice for the next king? Enjoy it and say yes to everything

By Luke Edwards

Jeff Duc's reign as Grape King won't go out with a fizzle. Instead, it'll be a busy few weeks as he prepares to hand the role over to whoever comes next.

And as he's discovered over the past year, that's the way it should be.

"Just enjoy it. Say yes to everything they ask you to do, and have fun," he said, offering some advice to the next Grape King that was quite similar to the encouragement he received when he was installed as Grape King last fall.

"I got to do a lot of things that I haven't done in a long time, all the wine events and things like that. So it was fun to do all that stuff," he said.

The Grape King is a longstanding tradition that dates back to 1956. Each year a king is selected from a prestigious group of nominees who exemplify excellence in the vineyard.

Duc is the second generation of his family to be named Grape King, with his opa Jack Forrer receiving the honours more than 50 years earlier. Duc and his dad Ray manage 250 acres of mixed grapes, supplying Arterra Wines.

Over the past year Duc said it's been a thrill to take part in all the events and activities that Grape Kings get invited to. One of the highlights was the trip out to the Okanagan Valley. Historically the Grape King would go out to a spring wine festival held in the area. The festival ended with the COVID-19 pandemic, but Grape Kings still get the opportunity to travel to B.C.

Duc said he was able to tour several grape and wine operations, learning about some of the commonalities between the two grape growing regions and also what makes each area unique.

"The trip out to the Okanagan was fantastic, that was a lot of fun," he said.

"It was interesting to see the different perspectives on things."

Duc still has a few busy weeks ahead of him, including the Grape and Wine Festival and the International Plowing Match, the latter of which is taking place here in Niagara beginning on Sept. 16 and is something Duc said he's never been able to attend before.

Over all, Duc said the biggest part of his year as Grape King was simply the recognition that goes with the position.

"Just being recognized by your peers and knowing and hearing that you're doing a good job. We all try to do our best but to be recognized every once in a while is pretty special," he said.

One thing he learned over the past 12 months is just how curious people are about grape growing. While out at events he was always answering questions from the public.

"You put the jacket and chains on and people just want to ask questions," he said.

As for the industry, Duc said things are looking fairly strong.

"It should be a good harvest this year," he said. It may be a tad on the light side, but the quality should be strong.

And with grapes in demand, he said there's reason for optimism.



Jeff Duc's time as Grape King is wrapping up. A new king will be announced in September as the Grape and Wine Festival gets underway. ~ Granthaven File Photo

"I think as an industry, everyone's feeling pretty good right now," he said.

As for the general public, his message was a common one that producers have been sharing in recent months.

"Keep supporting your local growers and your local community members," he said. 🍷



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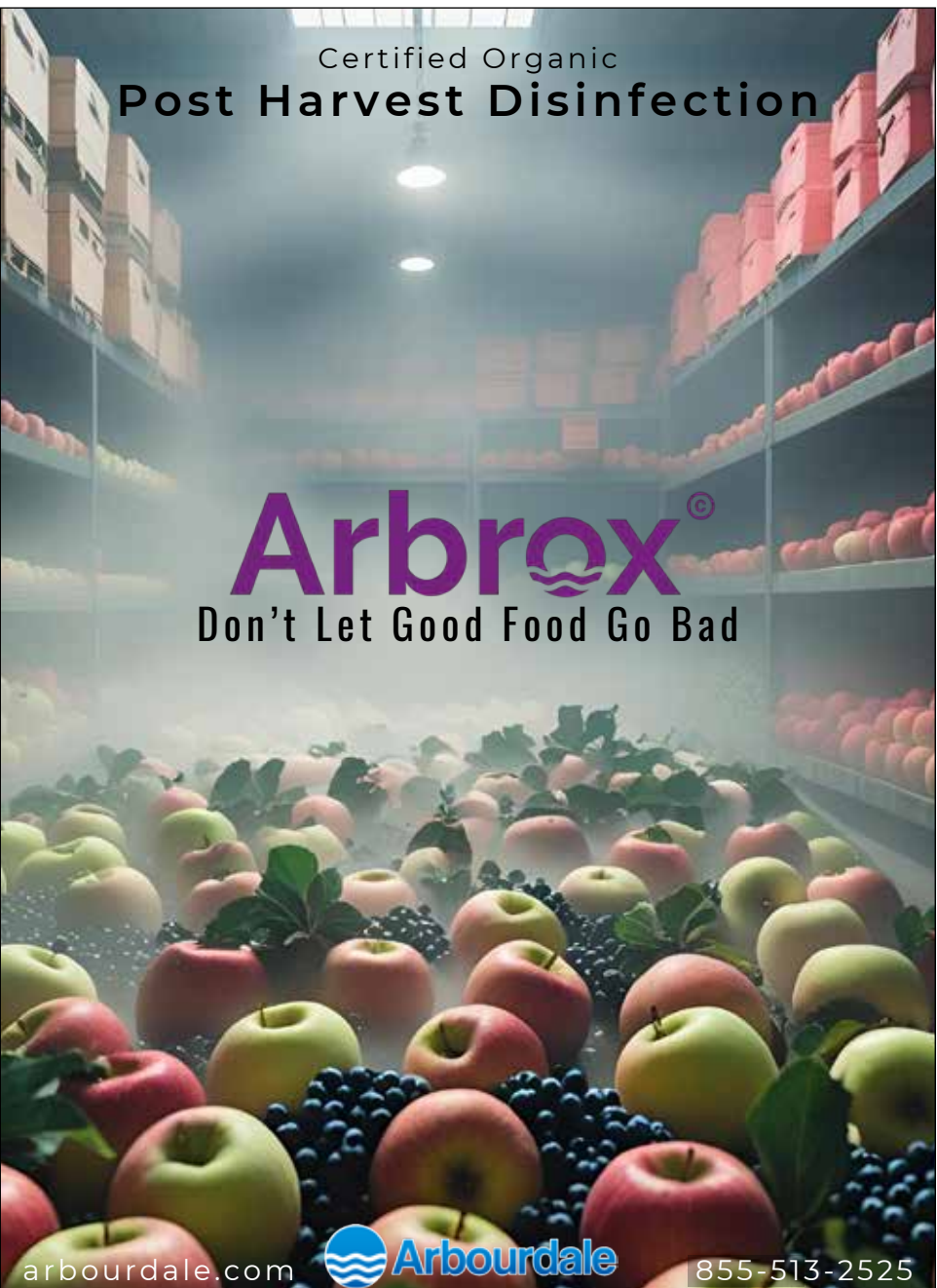
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Province investing \$1.7M to support Ontario beekeepers

More than 200 businesses will receive money to help protect colonies

By Niagara Farms Staff

They do far more than just provide a delicious topping for toast, and last month Ontario's bee population got a little help from the provincial and federal governments.

A cash injection through the Honey Bee Health Initiative will support 206 local beekeeper businesses and 334 total projects. All told the two levels of government will contribute more than \$1.7 million to the project that's administered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

"Honey bees in Ontario provide valuable pollination services to many of the crops we eat. High winter losses, new pests, and the threat of treatment resistance have made recent years challenging for Ontario's beekeepers," said Ontario Beekeepers' Association president Stephen Moore in a press release.

"The Honey Bee Health Initiative has been a valuable support for beekeepers who are having to change their practices or invest in new equipment to meet the emerging challenges. It is helping to enable beekeepers to continue to provide the critical pollination services to the broader agricultural and horticultural community here in Ontario."

The Healthy Bee Initiative provides cost-sharing opportunities for beekeepers to invest in



Government funding of \$1.7 million will support 206 Ontario beekeeper businesses and fund a total of 334 projects. ~ Farmphotos.ca photo

projects that reduce overwintering losses, purchase equipment to improve hive health management and acquire new honey bee stock or queens.

Funding comes through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

"This strategic investment supports innovation and strengthens resilience across Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sectors, helping our farmers and food businesses navigate today's economic challenges. By supporting our bee-

keeping industry, we're protecting the essential role pollinators play in agriculture and securing Ontario's food supply chains," said Trevor Jones, Ontario's minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness.

There were more than 4,000 registered beekeepers in Ontario last year, generating \$28 million in farm gate sales. Bees, and pollinators like them, play a vital role in the food system, with many crops reliant on them to grow. 🌱

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Red Trac open house supports Run for the Cure team

By Luke Edwards

Given it was their first open house on site since before COVID-19, the staff at Red Trac International weren't sure what to expect.

But the support blew them away, as customers and acquaintances came from far and wide and turned out last month for the Vineland dealership's event, which also raised \$4,000 for charity.

"It was a great turnout overall, a great day. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves," said Red Trac's Craig Parker, estimating more than 300 people attended.

The open house coincided with a major anniversary. Red Trac's a member of the Doughty & Williamson Group, a collection of four dealerships in southern Ontario. Ross Parker and the Red Trac team joined the D & W Group 45 years ago. Meanwhile, the group itself is celebrating 75 years in 2025, with its founding taking place in Jarvis by Jim Doughty and Drew Williamson back in 1950.

Since it was a major anniversary and it had been a few years since Red Trac held an open house, the Parkers, along with general manager Paul Hazlett decided it was a great time to give it another go.

It was also a perfect time to raise some funds since

Craig's wife, Gennie, who works in the health care system, is putting a team together for CIBC's Run for the Cure. So they set up a prize table and reached out to their contacts.

"It was just gift, after gift, after gift," said Craig.

Donations poured in from wineries, industry partners and even some competitors. Another Bush Hog was donated as the main gift, this time from Leading Edge and the D & W Group. It was won by Niagara-on-the-Lake grape grower and deputy mayor Erwin Wiens.

Red Trac raffled off a pink Bush Hog this past winter to raise money for the Terry Fox Foundation.

Other prizes included golf packages, helicopter rides and more.

Money raised will be donated to Gennie's team.

Parker said he and his team were grateful for all the support they received, including everyone who donated a prize and the many volunteers who helped make the event a success.

Red Trac offers a wide range of equipment for everything from orchards to landscaping, including products from JCB, Massey Ferguson, and more. They're open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday, and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. 🍃



To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the D&W Group, of which they've been a part since 1980, Red Trac held an open house at the Vineland store last month. In the photo, from left, is Craig Parker, Paul Hazlett and Ross Parker. The event raised about \$4,000 that will be donated to the Run for the Cure team that Craig's wife Gennie is organizing. ~ Luke Edwards photo



Red Trac offers a wide mix of agricultural, landscaping and industrial equipment, and staff found a unique way to use the bucket of this tractor during their open house. ~ Red Trac photo



Organizers were blown away by the donations made to a prize table at the Red Trac open house. ~ Red Trac photo

A guide to IPM 2025, as it returns to Niagara



After months of planning, the International Plowing Match is set to arrive in Niagara later this month. ~ Pixabay photo

By Luke Edwards

It very likely is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so visitors to this month's International Plowing Match and Rural Expo in Niagara will want to make the best of their time.

Returning to Niagara for the first time in a century, the West Niagara Fairgrounds will be the main hub of activity. With five, jam-packed days of fun and competition, there will be no shortage of things to do and see.

Here's what you need to know.

The competition

Everything revolves around the plowing match itself. Plowing competitions will take place around the fairgrounds area between Tuesday, Sept. 16 and Friday, Sept. 19. Contestants will try their hand in several categories, including horse, tractor and antique plowing.

A junior plowing competition will also be held on Saturday, Sept. 20.

But plowing won't be the only way to compete. Young women from across the province will participate in the Queen of the Furrow competition, which tests competitors' plowing skills, public speaking ability and commitment to agriculture.

Meanwhile, the Ram Rodeo Tour touches down at the IPM from Thursday, Sept. 17 to Saturday, Sept. 20.

Organizers will host a celebration of excellence on the evening of Friday, Sept. 19, honouring those competitors who excelled while also giving the five finalists for the Queen of the Furrow competition one last chance to wow the judges by answering an impromptu question.

The entertainment

There will be plenty of fun to be had outside the plowing matches and competitions, with various demonstrations and entertainers on hand. The Great Canadian

Lumberjacks will have daily shows, throwing axes and rolling logs. Or take a trip back in time and watch jousting reenactments with the Knights of Valour on Tuesday, Sept. 16 and Wednesday, Sept. 17.

From Wednesday to Friday the Global Pet Foods SuperDogs will perform tricks and stunts to wow the entire family.

The Canadian Cowgirls will perform their equestrian shows each day of the event.

Throughout the week visitors will also be able to take in the Quilt of Belonging, a 120-foot long collaborative textile art project that portrays the rich history of Canada's various Indigenous peoples.

The tented city

The fairgrounds will play host to the tented city, where dozens of exhibitors and corporate partners will be set up throughout the week. Equipment dealers and ag service providers will have tables set up, next to non-profits, food vendors and other suppliers.

Within the tented city there will also be two entertainment stages and special features including antique displays, souvenirs and more.

Ticket info

Tickets can be purchased online or at the gate. Early bird pricing ends on Tuesday, Sept. 9. Those planning to spend multiple days at the event will require a ticket for each day.

Early bird tickets are \$20 for adults or \$5 for kids. There's also a family option for two adults and two kids that's \$40.

Tickets at the gate are \$25 for adults and \$5 for kids.

Children five and under get in for free.

Parking is free. The fairgrounds are located at 7402 Mud St., with parking and plowing taking place on neighbouring lands. 🍃

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Province provides \$41M for Niagara irrigation project

Funding part of a \$135M announcement that includes support for Leamington greenhouse sector

By Luke Edwards

Provincial dollars are continuing to flow into Niagara’s regional irrigation efforts.

As part of a larger funding announcement for various water infrastructure projects in Niagara and Leamington, provincial officials last month announced \$41 million to help build out irrigation systems in the region. This comes on the heels of a milestone hit earlier this year that allows the regional project to undertake more detailed design work.

“This project will help get water to hundreds of local farms and agricultural businesses that grow some of the best tender fruit, grapes, vegetables and flowers in the world,” said Kinga Surma, Ontario’s minister of infrastructure.

Niagara’s irrigation project includes two prongs. The first will see a brand new system built to service the west end of the region, from rural western St. Catharines and out towards Beamsville for farms below the escarpment. A second aspect will see upgrades to Niagara-on-the-Lake’s existing system of open channel irrigation.

“Water is life for our farms and greenhouses. With this historic investment, our growers will have the stability they need to keep producing world-class vegetables, flowers, fruit, wine, and greenhouse crops, even in challenging seasons. It’s a win for our economy, a win for our farmers,



Included in a \$135 million announcement made in Niagara last month by officials from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness were matching \$41 million investments into Niagara’s irrigation project along with work to improve wastewater infrastructure in Leamington to help that area’s greenhouse sector. ~ Farmphotos.ca photo

and a win for food security across Ontario,” said Lincoln Mayor Sandra Easton.

Overall costs for the projects are not currently known. Regional planner Sean Norman said earlier this year that a big part of the design work currently being undertaken is to get an idea of what the costs will be. Funding is expected to come from a mix of government and industry partners, along with a potential cost to farmers themselves.

While Niagara’s irrigation project won’t be complete overnight, Ontario’s Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness Trevor Jones said it signals support for the local farming community, and that support comes at a vital time.

“Tariffs and trade disruptions have created an environment of uncertainty that cools investment and slows progress. We’ve felt the

consequences of that at home, across every sector,” he said.

A similar \$41 million will be spent in Leamington to improve wastewater services and support that area’s greenhouse sector.

Jones called it a “strategic \$82 million investment to strengthen two of Ontario’s most sensitive and critical growing regions for food production.”

The announcement was made inside a Niagara Falls water treatment facility last month during a mid-August heat wave. That made the timing seem appropriate.

“Irrigation projects protect crops during dry periods, like we’re in now,” Jones said.

“The impact of climate change, such as drought conditions, has highlighted the need for improved irrigation infrastructure across Niagara,” added regional chair Jim Bradley. 🌱

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🌿 AT THE MARKET 🌿

Corn stand offers life lessons along with peaches and cream

John Battle started roadside stand to teach grandkids the value of hard work

By Luke Edwards

Instead of spending his final days of summer holidays lounging around, Sam Battle remained hard at work, selling corn at the Stevensville Farmers Market.

The Wainfleet family set up shop at the Wednesday afternoon market in August, selling corn and tomatoes grown on their Townline Road property. The market was an addition to their roadside stand that's open daily.

Grandfather John Battle started up the little entrepreneurial effort to help teach his three grandkids, including Sam, the value of hard work as well as some of those life skills they may not learn in class when school resumes in September.

"When you work hard, you get rewarded," said John, as 13-year-old Sam bagged a few cobs of their peaches and cream corn for a customer.

John's three grandkids, along with his son and daughter in law, all help out, picking the corn and manning the roadside stand or booth at the Stevensville market.

Their first few weeks at the Stevensville market have been wonderful, John said, with friendly customers and a great atmosphere.

"We've met a lot of nice people," he said.

Most of the money they earn will be saved for the future, but John said the three grandkids will get to spend some of it right away on something they want.

The Stevensville market runs Wednesday afternoons from 2 to 6 p.m. until Oct. 8. It takes place at 2508 Stevensville Rd.

Battle said they hope to have enough corn to last through to the end of September. They'll be returning to the Stevensville market as long as they have corn, and are set up daily at the roadside stand, 50110 Wainfleet Welland Townline Rd. 🌿



John Battle started a roadside corn stand to help teach his three grandkids the value of hard work. They'll also be set up at the Stevensville market, likely through September. ~ Luke Edwards photo

To nominate a local vender for our monthly "AT THE MARKET" feature, contact Luke Edwards at luke@granthaven.com

Autumn is a great time to visit events featuring Ontario grown foods

By Michelle Seaborn

August starts with a holiday weekend, ends with a holiday weekend and is packed with all sorts of festivals featuring food. But the fun doesn't end with Labour Day.

One farmer mentioned that summer is over when the wheat is harvested, and it seems to be the way as we prepare for the autumn season. This is a great season to get out and enjoy all that Niagara farmers have to offer. Peach festivals seemed to dominate the festivities in August as we headed towards fall fairs that will be kicking into high gear starting in September.

Also in September is the long-awaited International Plowing Match, which will see

thousands of people arriving throughout the west Niagara municipalities during the five-day event that kicks off on Tuesday Sept. 16 and concludes on Sept. 20. See farming at its finest!

Many farmers markets and fall fairs will be featuring all that Niagara has to offer now that cooler weather and shorter days are upon us. Fruit will highlight the new arrivals with a vast variety of apples, pears, plums, nectarines and peaches. Ever-bearing strawberries and raspberries will also be available as will various melons: watermelon, cantaloupe, and honeydew.

The vegetable lover won't be left out either. Field tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and onions will join with sweet corn, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli and carrots. Many

tender varieties of lettuce can still be found, and a popular staple is mushrooms which we have seen most of this season.

This year the Grimsby Farmers Market is bringing back the popular Street Feast. This ticketed event that takes place on Sept. 11 from 5 to 7 p.m. will seat 100 people to enjoy a three-course meal that features products purchased at the market and cooked on site by our chefs from August Restaurant.

Tickets are available from the McNally House booth at the market or through McNally House in Grimsby. This fundraiser will assist McNally House with all the work that they do. 🌿

Michelle Seaborn is the Grimsby Farmers Market manager

NIAGARA FARMS

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Luke Edwards, Editor
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Teddy takeover at the Grimsby market

By Niagara Farms Staff

Usually it's the fresh produce and tasty treats that are the stars of the show at the Grimsby Farmers Market, but earlier this summer the peaches and plums gave way to the stuffies.

An annual tradition at the market, the special teddy bear event saw a younger collection of market visitors come out to the Thursday market on July 31. Kids from Grimsby and beyond had a chance to pick out a new teddy bear, decorate (and of course, eat) their own cookies,

take part in other activities and listen to a story time from the Grimsby Public Library.

The Grimsby Farmers Market continues on this month, running Thursdays from 3 to 7 p.m. in downtown Grimsby. 🌱



Maxen and Mila Driscoll pick out a couple of teddy bears at the special teddy bear themed Grimsby Farmers Market earlier this summer. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Mitsushita Doomra found a stuffy to be her new companion.



The Grimsby Public Library offered a story time for kids and their teddy bears at a special Grimsby Farmers Market earlier this summer.



Mackenzie Montgomery came up to the Grimsby Farmers Market from Beamsville with her mom Courtney, and was thrilled to get a balloon animal Pikachu.



A fixture at the Grimsby Farmers Market, Halaloo crafted balloon animals for youngsters.

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‘The fall really decides’: Grape growers hopeful for a good harvest

By Luke Edwards

Each year as summer draws to an end, there’s a period where Niagara grape growers have essentially done all they can to prepare their vineyards and simply wait to see what Mother Nature brings in the fall.

While 2025 brought with it challenges on several fronts for the industry, Grape Growers of Ontario chair Matthias Oppenlaender said this year could still prove successful even if yields are a little on the light side.

“All the costs, all the input has been done...we’re all waiting for the harvest time and hopefully we have a good fall. That’s really what

sets us up well. The fall really decides,” he said in an interview with Niagara Farms in mid-August.

Parts of Niagara had just received a rare downpour in what has been a mostly dry summer. Oppenlaender said grape growers have been utilizing irrigation this summer, but were hoping for some more moisture in the days leading up to harvest. He estimated a start date of around Sept. 10 to 15 for the start of harvest, which would be more or less average, though with changing weather patterns it’s a bit of a moving target.

“It’s typical?” he said. “Nobody knows what’s a normal, typical year to be honest with you, but it seems to be fairly normal.”

Yields might be a little lighter this year than normal. Oppenlaender said a few cold weather events in the winter, along with the dry summer, are the main causes of that.

“We know that the whites, especially chardonnays, are light,” he said.

And while they won’t know until they start actually pulling the fruit off the vines, Oppenlaender said it could be a good year for quality.

“It’s a little early but we’re set up for a good quality, a lighter crop usually increases the quality,” he said.

Over all, the chair said there’s some optimism in the industry, despite ongoing challenges of rising input costs.

“There’s a demand for grapes. We’re thankful for the support the Ford government is giving the industry and especially the wineries, and sales seem to be good, especially VQA,” he said

“There’s some optimism, but it is challenging.”

With a strong demand and lighter expected yields, Oppenlaender said they aren’t expecting any surpluses in grapes this year.

And when the harvest does start, they’ll be hoping for dry weather, with fairly average temperatures. Warm days and cool nights would be ideal.

But that’s up to Mother Nature.



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Matthias Oppenlaender is the chair of the Grape Growers of Ontario. ~ GGO photo



The grape harvest in Niagara should start in mid-September. ~ Farmphotos.ca photo

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Brown Homestead offers fall speaker series on ag history

By Luke Edwards

This fall, take a tour through Niagara's farming past, deep, deep into the history as well as a glimpse into the future.

The Brown Homestead in St. Catharines is running a fall speakers series looking at the history of agriculture in the region, from the earliest Indigenous people straight through to present day robotics-assisted farming. The four presentations begin on Sept. 11 and run through until Oct. 16.

"Agricultural history is key to the story of Niagara, and our annual Agricultural History Speakers Series is a chance to bring together different voices and thoughtful perspectives as we broaden how this story is told. We are excited to hear from folks as they share their real-world experience and lessons growing up and working on farms across Niagara," said Sara Nixon, director of community engagement for the Homestead.

Participation is free, though registration is required because space is limited. A registration form is available at thebrownhomestead.ca. Those interested can also call the homestead at 905-328-1646 for information.

Here are the topics that will be covered in the fall series:

Thursday, Sept. 11 - Indigenous Agricultural Practices and Tools. The homestead will welcome McMaster Professor of Indigenous Studies Adrienne Lickers Xavier to St. Catharines for a presentation on how the first people to settle in the area developed agriculture. She'll

explore how different tools were made, how they changed over time, and what impact that had on farming the land and growing crops.

Thursday, Sept. 25 - From Barn Boots to Bluetooth: The Changing Story of Our Family Dairy Farm. The world of farming looks vastly different from even just a few decades ago, and one of the spaces where that is most evident is inside a modern dairy barn. Thorold's Rachel Summers, a sixth generation dairy and grain farmer, will take visitors through the evolution of their family farm while sharing some of her memories and experiences from growing up on the farm, along with stories from family members.

Thursday, Oct. 9 - 50 years of Technological Changes on Ontario Farms. The evolution of farming continues with an October presentation from Hugh Fraser, a well known agricultural engineer and Ontario Barn Preservation President. He'll look at how technology has advanced on Ontario farms between 1975 and 2025. He'll share dozens of photos of what he's seen on the farm over the past 50 years, and take a look into his crystal ball for what he sees coming in the future.

Thursday, Oct. 16 - On Being With the Land: Author Talk and Creative Writing Session. The series wraps up with writer and poet Tonya Lailey sharing works from her book of poetry titled Farm: Lot 23. This event will also include audience participation, as she'll work with members to remember and write about a childhood relationship to the land. Her presentation will be done through Zoom. 🌱



For four Thursdays this fall, visitors to the Brown Homestead in St. Catharines can learn about the history of farming in Niagara, from Indigenous tools and techniques all the way up to present day technology. On Oct. 9, agricultural engineer Hugh Fraser will discuss technological advances over the past 50 years. ~ Contributed photo

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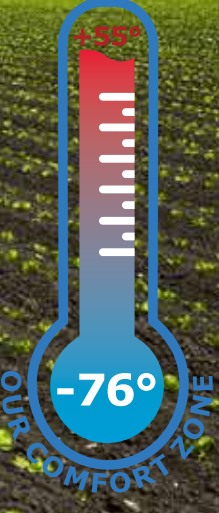






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Partnership aims to promote safety at agritourism workplaces

By Niagara Farms Staff

They can be among the most picturesque and beautiful places to visit, but many agritourism locations are still working farms that pose potential dangers.

A new partnership between Agritourism Ontario and Workplace Safety and Prevention Services seeks to promote safety within the agritourism sector. The collaboration was announced last month in a press release from Agritourism Ontario.

“The agritourism industry blends hospitality with agriculture, creating unique safety considerations for both workers and visitors,” said Agritourism Ontario CEO Kevin Vallier. “By working with WSPS, we’re equipping our members with the tools and knowledge they need to create safer experiences for everyone on the farm.”

A non-profit organization that’s focused on protecting Ontario’s workers and businesses, WSPS serves more than 174,000 member firms and 4.2 million workers across a mix of sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and service.

“We commend Agritourism Ontario for their leadership and dedication to safety,” said WSPS President and CEO Jody Young. “As WSPS serves both the agriculture and services sectors, we are uniquely positioned to provide our expertise and support. This partnership allows us to engage directly with agritourism operators and help them to create safer environments for their staff, guests, and larger communities.”

The collaboration will see the two organizations work together to share information and content on how to make agritourism workplaces safer, educate employers and employees, and



While farms can be wonderful, fun and beautiful places to visit, they can also pose dangers. WSPS and Agritourism Ontario are working together to keep agritourism locations as safe as possible. ~ Farmphotos.ca photo

plan events and resource distribution opportunities.

Agritourism Ontario is a part of Ontario’s nearly \$51 billion agri-food sector and represents a diverse network of farm-based agritourism businesses across the province, advocating for

the growth and sustainability of the sector. The organization supports members through education, marketing, and policy development to ensure a vibrant and safe agritourism industry.



Come visit my booth at the West Niagara Fair and Wainfleet Fair!

Hope to see everyone at the 2025 International Plowing Match and Rural Expo in Grassie - held in Niagara for the first time in almost 90 years.



SAM OOSTERHOFF

MPP - Niagara West



Projectile weed control research shows approach has promise

By Tamara Botting

Agriculture is an industry of ingenuity.

There are many factors that can impact crops, like frost, high winds, the amount of rain-fall, etc. Weed control is one of the main ways farmers can give themselves the best chance for a successful season.

Herbicides are one way to limit the spread of unwanted plants in the field, but researchers are looking to add more tools to the box – and one in particular is looking promising.

Robert E. Nurse is a research scientist in the Science and Technology branch of the Government of Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada department.

He's part of a team that's entering their fourth year of studying the efficacy of high projectile weed control.

"Essentially, the goal here is we want to reduce the reliance on herbicides," Nurse said.

"By using high velocity projectiles, we're hoping to either get the plants at very young age – if they're really, really small, we're hoping that it'll kill them completely – or if they're larger – like say, more than five to 10 centimeters – we're hoping that we'll hit and affect the growing point, and then we can come in with an herbicide and take out the rest of the plant."

There's also the possibility that they could damage the leaves of the unwanted plants, "and with that damage, it could introduce disease into the weed that could take them out as well. So, we're looking at a lot of different factors."

For the experiment – which is taking place in different areas and with different crops across Canada – they chose to work with three mediums for the proof of concept stage: corn grit, walnut shells and baking soda. These were chosen because they're all commercially available, to a certain extent.

In their testing, the researchers are using a compressor and sandblasting equipment.

"Ultimately, if it's successful, it would be commercialized into something like a modified sprayer, (where) you could do it using a tractor," Nurse said.

Initially, they started their testing by using combinations of the different mediums. However, "we found that if we tried to combine them, the spray gun with clog up. So, we've found over the course of the trial that instead of trying to do them as mixes, it's better to do them sequentially ... either on the same day, or a few days apart."



When projectile weed control is used in conjunction with herbicides or bioherbicides, weed control is scoring better than 80 per cent.



Researchers in the Science and Technology branch of the Government of Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada department are entering their fourth year of studying the efficacy of projectile weed control.

That wasn't the only discovery when it came to testing the different mediums.

All things being relative, the researchers chose the different mediums because it would offer a variety of sizes to test.

Nurse said the researchers were expecting walnut shells to be the most effective as a standalone treatment, "because they're large; they would rip the leaves and everything. But actually, it's the baking soda that tends to be the best treatment that we have found."

He explained, "The smaller the particle size, the better, because it gets through the nozzles better; it doesn't clog up as much, and it actually injures the weeds more, because it's coming out of the gun at a higher velocity."

While it hasn't been part of the trials so far, Nurse said he would be interested in looking at water as a medium for projectile weed control.

"Especially using hotter – like boiling – water, or something that would have a double effect," he said. "It's just the concern of water being a limited available asset to some growers; they don't all necessarily have access to the amount of water that you would have to use to do a large acreage field."

In the meantime, there's still plenty to investigate with the current mediums being trialed.

With the baking soda specifically, there's a question of whether it's changing the pH levels of the soil.

"We don't have that data yet, but that is a concern in some cases," Nurse said. "I think at the rates we're using it, there's unlikely to be a huge effect on the soil chemistry, but we are going to verify that."

There are other factors the researchers are looking into with their testing, Nurse said.

"We're not just looking at the abrasives alone."

For instance, the angle used to apply the abrasives can impact the efficacy.

"We're finding that the 45-degree angle is the best," Nurse said.

With the testing, the researchers tried to pick crops that would be more tolerant to the projectile weed control if they happened to get hit with 'friendly fire.' For instance, in Ontario, they're looking at using this process with white beans; in Prince Edward Island, it's being used

with potatoes; and in Quebec, they're testing it in vineyards.

"We do get a little bit of crop injury through it, but when we're going for the weeds, we're trying to aim below the canopy – if there is a canopy that has already formed – so the injury is minimal to the crop," Nurse said.

Ideally, the projectile weed control should be used when the weeds are just emerging from the soil. Of course, that's not always going to happen on a busy farm; projectile weed control is an imperfect practice.

"When we're going through, (we) don't necessarily capture everything," Nurse said. But it doesn't have to be an either/ or choice for farmers – and the data is showing that it shouldn't be.

"I don't think the abrasives alone are going to be good enough in most cases, because you have a mixture of large weeds and small weeds," Nurse said.

"If (the weeds are) larger, we found that it's best to pair the abrasives with an herbicide. For this project specifically, we've switched to looking at a bioherbicide, just to target more of the reduced risk – maybe the organic sector – with the project."

Nurse noted that when projectile weed control practices have been paired with a bioherbicide – or, as in the past, when they've done it with an herbicide – weed control is scoring better than 80 per cent.

"When you combine it with that bioherbicide or herbicide, you're getting good control that way," Nurse said. "We've been able to reduce the amount of herbicide that we're using, or the amount of treatments or applications that would be required, while still maintaining the weed control. And we've had less than 10 per cent crop injury."

Even with promising results so far, the work is far from done.

"If the project continues ... the next logical step is to either start trying to get an engineer on the project and (design a) commercialized unit or do some grower trials, but we aren't at that stage yet," Nurse said.

In the meantime, the research continues. 🌱

'Hands-on history': Marshville offers a taste of the past

By Luke Edwards

The world turned upside down for a second as Daniela Bernaise, her brother Matthew and father Dave took turns peering through the eyepiece.

Driving down from Thorold for the day, the family was enjoying their first Marshville Heritage Festival in several years. The world altering view came courtesy an antique piece of surveying equipment that turned everything upside down because the technology of the day only allowed for a single lens.

"I really like seeing how everything used to be done," said Matthew. Instead of watching a documentary or reading an article, events like Marshville give people like the Bernaises a chance to touch and experience history.

It was a mentality shared by Kaitlin Peters, a member of the Niagara Parks team that had brought a couple of old printing presses down to the Wainfleet festival.

"It's getting back into hands-on-history," she said, shortly after using a small Adana press to create a bookmark with "Marshville" written out in an old timey font.

The Adana press is fully non-electric, meaning it's fairly easy to use. As such, visitors were able to print their own bookmarks. Nearby was the organization's Whitlock press, built in the 1890s.

Marshville is a long standing annual tradition that takes visitors back to the days of the early European settlers who came to Niagara. Restored buildings sit on the property, offering spaces for demonstrations to take place during the Labour Day weekend festival.

Inside one of the buildings was Larry Miller and Mark Shoalts. As Shoalts used antique hand tools to build a custom made toybox, Miller showed off some of the tools he's collected ever since he became interested in antique tools when coming across an old loom while exploring his grandfather's home as a teenager.

He collects carpenter's tools as well as early American clocks.

"I look for quality in tools," he said. Some of the visitors got to try their hand with an old scroll saw he owns that was built sometime between 1861 and 1865.

Next door, Elaine Anderson was busy spinning a length of two-ply yarn.

Anderson was a longtime visitor to the festival before becoming a volunteer around five years ago. While Marshville is primarily focused on the past Anderson said it's about more than that.

"It's important for the kids to see what was done in the past, but also to look to the future," she said.

Many of the processes that were daily life in the old days still have their own little niche pockets in the 2020s.

Back at the surveyor's booth, Matthew Bernaise agreed. Even if the specifics have changed, a lot of the technology of today is built on ideas first put forward hundreds of years ago.

Marshville, he said, makes that connection while allowing visitors to experience it first hand.

"I want to touch it, and look at it," he said.



Antique cars and trucks welcomed visitors to the Marshville Heritage Festival. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Jim Bucknall's 17-horsepower Sawyer Massey steam engine is a longtime popular attraction to Marshville.



An old John Deere tractor on display.

Marshville Heritage Festival 2025



Mark Shoalts works on what will become a handmade toybox.



Doppelganger performs near Dean's Garage during the Marshville Heritage Festival.



Kaitlin Peters, from Niagara Parks, helped visitors make their own commemorative



Daniela Bernaise peers through an old piece of surveying equipment.



Antique farm equipment on display at Marshville.



Elaine Anderson spins a length of two-ply yarn.



The Eggers performed sawing demonstrations at Marshville.



The question this month is: Wine not?

As the grape harvest gets underway this month, wine lovers won't have to go far to find a glass of their favourite Niagara wine.

While wine is delicious in a glass all on its own, there are many ways to use up a bottle in your meal planning that can elevate what otherwise might be a rather plain meal.

So as you raise your glass to the hardworking people in Niagara's grape and wine industry, consider using a bit of that liquid gold in your next meal.

And fear not, several of these recipes have alternatives for those who aren't wine drinkers.

Thanks to our friends at Foodland Ontario for once again providing the recipes.

Duck Breast with Ginger, Apple and Red Wine Reduction



Ingredients

- 2 Ontario Duck Breasts, about 8 oz (250 g)
- Salt and pepper
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) finely chopped Ontario Onion
- 3 slices gingerroot
- 1 clove Ontario garlic, minced
- 3/4 cup (175 mL) Ontario Red Wine
- 1 small unpeeled Ontario Apple, cut into 1/2-inch (1 cm) slices
- 3 tbsp (45 mL) Ontario Honey
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) Ontario fresh thyme leaves or 1/4 tsp (1 mL) dried

Instructions

Using sharp knife, score duck breast skin crosswise, then lengthwise every 1/2-inch (1 cm) to make crosshatch pattern. Generously season both sides with salt and pepper.

Place breasts, skin side down, in large skillet. (Don't use nonstick or add additional fat.) Cook over medium-low heat, draining off fat occasionally, until duck skin is crispy and deep golden brown, about 15 minutes. Flip breast and sear other side, about 2 minutes. Place, skin-side up, on small baking sheet; roast in 425°F (220°C) oven until meat thermometer reaches 155°F (68°C), 5 to 7 minutes.

Meanwhile, leave 1 tbsp (15 mL) fat in skillet. Add onion, ginger and garlic; cook over low heat just until softened, 2 minutes. Add wine, stirring to scrape up any brown bits from bottom of pan. Add apple, honey and thyme; simmer until apple is tender and sauce is reduced and syrupy, 3 to 5 minutes. Discard ginger; add salt and pepper to taste. To serve, thinly slice duck and spoon sauce over top.

Tip: For a fancy presentation, serve duck breast on top of mashed potatoes angled slightly. Spoon a little sauce on top, but also drizzled around outside of potatoes; garnish with a sprig of fresh thyme.

Grilled Turkey and Pear Sandwich



Ingredients

- 2 tbsp (25 mL) lemon juice
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) white wine or apple juice
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) olive oil
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) chopped fresh Ontario Rosemary
- 12 oz (375 g) Ontario Turkey Sca-loppine
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) red pepper jelly
- 4 croissants, sliced
- Ontario Leaf Lettuce
- 2 Ontario Pears, unpeeled and sliced

Instructions

In bowl, combine lemon juice, wine, oil and rosemary; add turkey and marinate while grill is heating. Grill or broil on lightly oiled rack over medium heat just until no pink remains in centre, about 3 minutes per side. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Spread red pepper jelly over croissants. Line with lettuce. Top with grilled turkey and several pear slices.

White Sangria with Nectarines and Cor-onation Grapes



Ingredients

- 2 bottles (750 mL each) Ontario Pinot Grigio or other dry white wine
- 1-1/2 cups (375 mL) peach schnapps or orange-flavoured liqueur
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) granulated sugar

- 6 Ontario Nectarines, pitted and sliced or chopped
- 2 cups (500 mL) Ontario Blue Cor-onation Grapes or Ontario Wild Blueberries
- Soda or sparkling water (optional)

Instructions

Into large pitcher, pour wine and peach schnapps. Stir in sugar until dissolved. Add nectarines and grapes. Chill for several hours before serving. Pour over ice in glass, along with some of the fruit. If desired, top with soda water.

For non-alcoholic punch:

Use 6 cups (1.5 L) white cranberry or white grape juice in place of wine. Replace schnapps with peach nectar. Omit sugar.

Nectarine Sparkling Quencher



Ingredients

- 2 large Ontario Nectarines, pitted and chopped (about 2 cups/500 mL)
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) each granulated sugar and water
- 1 strip lemon peel (2- x 1-inch/5 x 2.5 cm)
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp (10 mL) grated fresh ginger-root
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed or orange liqueur
- Chilled sparkling water or Ontario White Sparkling Wine

Garnish:

- 4 slices Ontario Nectarine
- Sprigs of fresh Ontario Mint

Instructions

In medium saucepan, combine nectarines, sugar and water. Bring to boil; reduce heat and simmer until fruit is very soft, about 10 minutes. Mash; add lemon peel, lemon juice and ginger. Cover and let stand for 30 minutes. Remove peel.

In blender, combine nectarine mixture and orange juice concentrate; blend until smooth. Press purée through fine sieve into measuring cup: cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

To serve, divide purée between four glasses. Top with sparkling water and stir to blend. Gar-nish with nectarine slice and mint.



Turkey Scaloppini Al Pomodoro



Ingredients

- 1 lb (500 g) thin Ontario Turkey Breast Scaloppine (6 to 8 slices)
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) bottled teriyaki marinade and sauce
- all-purpose flour
- 3 tbsp (45 mL) olive oil

Sauce:

- 1/2 cup (125 mL) chopped Ontario Green Onions
- 3 medium Ontario Tomatoes, chopped (approx 3 cups/750 mL)
- 1 clove Ontario Garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) red wine
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) bottled teriyaki marinade and sauce
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) granulated sugar

Instructions

Marinate turkey slices in teriyaki sauce 15 minutes, turning once. Drain well. Coat each piece lightly with flour, shaking off any excess. In large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, heat 1 tbsp (15 mL) of the oil. In batches, sauté turkey slices about 1 minute per side or until no longer pink inside. Remove to serving platter; keep warm. Add more oil to pan and continue with all turkey slices.

Sauce: Wipe out pan and add 1 tbsp (15 mL) of oil. Add green onions and sauté 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes, garlic, wine, teriyaki sauce and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer 5 minutes. To serve, spoon sauce over turkey.

Vegetable and Lamb Sauté



Ingredients

- 1 Ontario Greenhouse Cucumber
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) each salt and pepper
- 1 lb (500 g) lean boneless Ontario Lamb (preferably loin), thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) olive oil
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) minced Ontario Shallots (or 1 small Ontario Onion, minced)
- 3 cups (750 mL) sliced Ontario Mushrooms

- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp (5 mL) each dried thyme and rosemary leaves
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) each dry Ontario White Wine and chicken broth (or all broth)
- 2 large Ontario Greenhouse Tomatoes, cut in wedges
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) fresh lemon juice

Instructions

Quarter cucumber lengthwise; slice cross-wise and set aside.

In medium bowl, combine 2 tbsp (25 mL) of the flour, salt and pepper; add lamb and toss to coat. In large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat; brown lamb 3 to 4 minutes per side, in batches if necessary. Transfer to bowl.

Add shallots and mushrooms; cook 3 minutes. Add reserved cucumber, garlic, thyme and rosemary; cook 2 minutes. Sprinkle in remaining flour and cook for 1 minute. Stir in wine and broth; bring to boil, scraping up browned bits. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes or until slightly thickened. Reduce heat to low. Return lamb and any juices to pan. Stir in tomatoes and lemon juice and heat through. 🌿



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Not just a fad, buy local has staying power when it comes to Ontario wine

Owner of Leaning Post Wine says Ontario wines are gaining traction globally

By Luke Edwards

When the words “51st state” and “tariffs” started getting thrown around several months ago, Nadia Senchuk thought she’d have to put a planned expansion into the United States on hold.

On the bright side, many people thought a temporary boost in business from locals as part of a “buy Canada” push seemed inevitable, giving wineries like Leaning Post some much needed revenue during a period of economic uncertainty.

It turns out neither prediction was entirely correct, and on both accounts, it’s for the better.

Come October, Leaning Post will be expanding into the American market, offering their high-end wines in New York.

“We wanted to go into the U.S. market, and I thought to myself, clearly this is not the year,” she said, remembering back to the early parts of 2025 when Canada-U.S. trade relations soured.

“A U.S. importer reached out to us and I was completely wrong. I’m going to be in New York City in October with our wines.”

Not only is Senchuk discovering a newfound interest in Ontario wines from Americans - part of an overarching increase from distributors across the globe - but she also said the push for locals to buy Ontario wine isn’t just a fad. Instead, it seems to have some real staying power.

When the tariff wars began ramping up, Senchuk said there was a prevailing thought that “buy local” efforts would be temporary and after a while people would return to their old habits.



The owners of Leaning Post Wines say the ‘buy local’ push that began with this spring’s tariff war launched by the United States shows no signs of slowing down when it comes to Ontario wine. ~ Contributed photos

“There’s always going to be those people who go back...but people have found alternatives and it’s not just us,” she said.

The reaction to the tariff war, especially the move by the LCBO to take American brands off the shelves and focus more on Ontario and Canada, may have been the spark. But Senchuk said there still has to be substance that keeps the flame lit.

“We have people coming into the winery saying ‘Alright, this is what I love, prove me wrong. I can’t get my Josh pinot or my Napa cab, show me what you’ve got,’” she said, referring to some popular California wines.

“And they’re leaving pleasantly surprised. I think consumer perceptions are really, really changing.”

Senchuk admits she may be optimistic - her given name comes from the Ukrainian word for hope, after all - but it now seems like the vast majority of wine drinkers who have switched over to Ontario wines in recent months will stick to their newfound favourites long after the trade disputes end.

Andrea Peters, senior public relations manager for Wines of Ontario, agreed with Senchuk’s assessment.

“From our perspective at Wines of Ontario, the push to ‘buy local’ remains strong. Ontario consumers continue to show pride in choosing VQA wine, especially when they know their purchase directly supports local growers, wine-makers and communities,” she said.

Though pressures remain based on trade dynamics and shifting consumer habits, Peters said a desire to maintain a sense of authenticity and place in what they drink is keeping Ontarians focused on local products.

With no end in sight for trade challenges, Peters said her organization is working to make VQA wine “more accessible and approachable.”

Those efforts included things like a summer residency at STACKT Market in Toronto.

“Looking ahead, we see the ‘buy local’ mindset as a long-term strength. It’s not just a trend - it reflects a deeper cultural shift toward valuing sustainability, community and authenticity. For Ontario VQA wine, that means continued opportunity to connect with consumers who want both quality and meaning in their glass,” Peters said.

Back at Leaning Post, Senchuk is looking forward to continuing serving both local customers and an expanding international market. In addition to entering the American market this fall, Senchuk said she’s been in contact with a distributor in New Zealand who wants to import some of Leaning Post’s wines. To have a New Zealand wine distributor looking for Ontario sauvignon blancs - even if it’s just a small, niche order - is a sign local producers have risen to a new level.

“I think there’s a change that’s happening right now with Ontario wine and people are ready,” she said. 🍷



Nadia and Ilya Senchuk own Leaning Post Wines in Stoney Creek. Not only are more Canadians interested in locally produced wine, but Nadia said distributors from the U.S. and even New Zealand are interested in selling their wines.

AG EVENTS ON THE HORIZON

September is a busy month in rural Niagara, with fall fairs keeping everyone busy throughout the weekends.

Also this year we'll see the International Plowing Match return to Niagara starting Sept. 16.

Here is a rundown of some of the ag related things coming up in September and beyond.

THROUGHOUT SEPTEMBER

FALL FAIRS

Fair season returns in September. Here are the dates for the local fairs: **West Niagara Fair** runs from **Friday, Sept. 5 to Sunday, Sept. 7**; **Binbrook Fall Fair** runs from **Thursday, Sept. 11 to Sunday, Sept. 14**; **Wainfleet Fall Fair** runs from **Thursday, Sept. 18 to Saturday, Sept. 20**; **Ancaster Fall Fair** runs from **Thursday, Sept. 18 to Sunday, Sept. 21**; and the **Caledonia Fall Fair** runs from **Thursday, Sept. 25 to Sunday, Sept. 28**.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 25 TO SUNDAY, SEPT. 28

GRAPE AND WINE

Niagara's annual celebration of its most famous potent potable returns in September. The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival includes four days of fun at Montebello Park from Thursday, Sept. 25 to Sunday, Sept. 28, along with other activities like Grande Parade and Pied Piper Parade. For more information visit niagarawinefestival.com.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 16 TO SATURDAY, SEPT. 20

IPM 2025

West Niagara plays host to the International Plowing Match this month. Running Sept. 16-20 in and around the West Niagara Fairgrounds, the event features several days of plowing competition along with a rural expo where visitors can tour the vendors, demonstrations, entertainment and food. For more information, including for tickets, visit plowingmatch.org/ipm2025.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 8 AND THURSDAY, OCT 9

CANADIAN GREENHOUSE CONFERENCE

Once the excitement of September is over, there will still be plenty to do in October. One of the big events is the two-day Canadian Greenhouse Conference, which returns to Niagara Falls on Oct. 8 and 9. The conference features a trade show, two days of sessions, along with a few networking events. It takes place at the Niagara Falls Convention Centre. For more information visit canadiangreenhouseconference.com.



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AG BRIEFS

Cleanfarms celebrates 15 years

An agricultural stewardship organization celebrated an anniversary this year, while surpassing a milestone.

Cleanfarms collected more than 10 million kg in agricultural plastics last year, an increase over the 9.2 million kg the organization collected in 2023.

"We're seeing the results of strong partnerships and hard work on the ground," said Barry Friesen, executive director at Cleanfarms, in a press release. "It's farmers who are preparing their materials properly and bringing them to collection sites, site staff who provide the drop-off locations, and our recycler partners who keep these materials moving through the value chain that are making this happen, day by day."

The organization highlighted achievements made in each province, including Ontario, where bulk container volumes increased from 4,560 units in 2023 to 4,940 last year.

Cleanfarms works with farmers and farm organizations to recover and recycle agricultural and related industry plastics, packaging and products. It's member-funded.

New chair of Ontario Farm Marketing Commission

There's a new person at the head of the commission that regulates and oversees the province's 25 marketing boards and associations for commodities like milk, eggs and grains.

Brendan Byrne took over as chair of the Ontario Farm Marketing Commission earlier this summer. He brings with him a resume full of agriculture experience, including positions as vice chair of the President's Council, chair of the Essex County Soil and Crop Improvement Association, chair of the Grain Farmers of Ontario and OFPMC commission member.

He's also a graduate of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program and manages a family run cash crop operation that's been around for more than 100 years.

"I am confident Brendan will bring bold and positive leadership to the commission during this time of economic uncertainty in the face of U.S. tariffs," said Trevor Jones, minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness in a press release. "With over 20 years of agricultural experience he will be a passionate advocate for our province's \$51 billion agri-food sector—helping farmers work together to maintain the high-quality Ontario is known for."

He takes over from outgoing chair Amy Cronin. Jones thanked Cronin for her dedication over the five years she spent as chair.

Anand Sundaresan takes over as Trouw Nutrition managing director

Trouw Nutrition North America announced a new managing director for the livestock feed business.

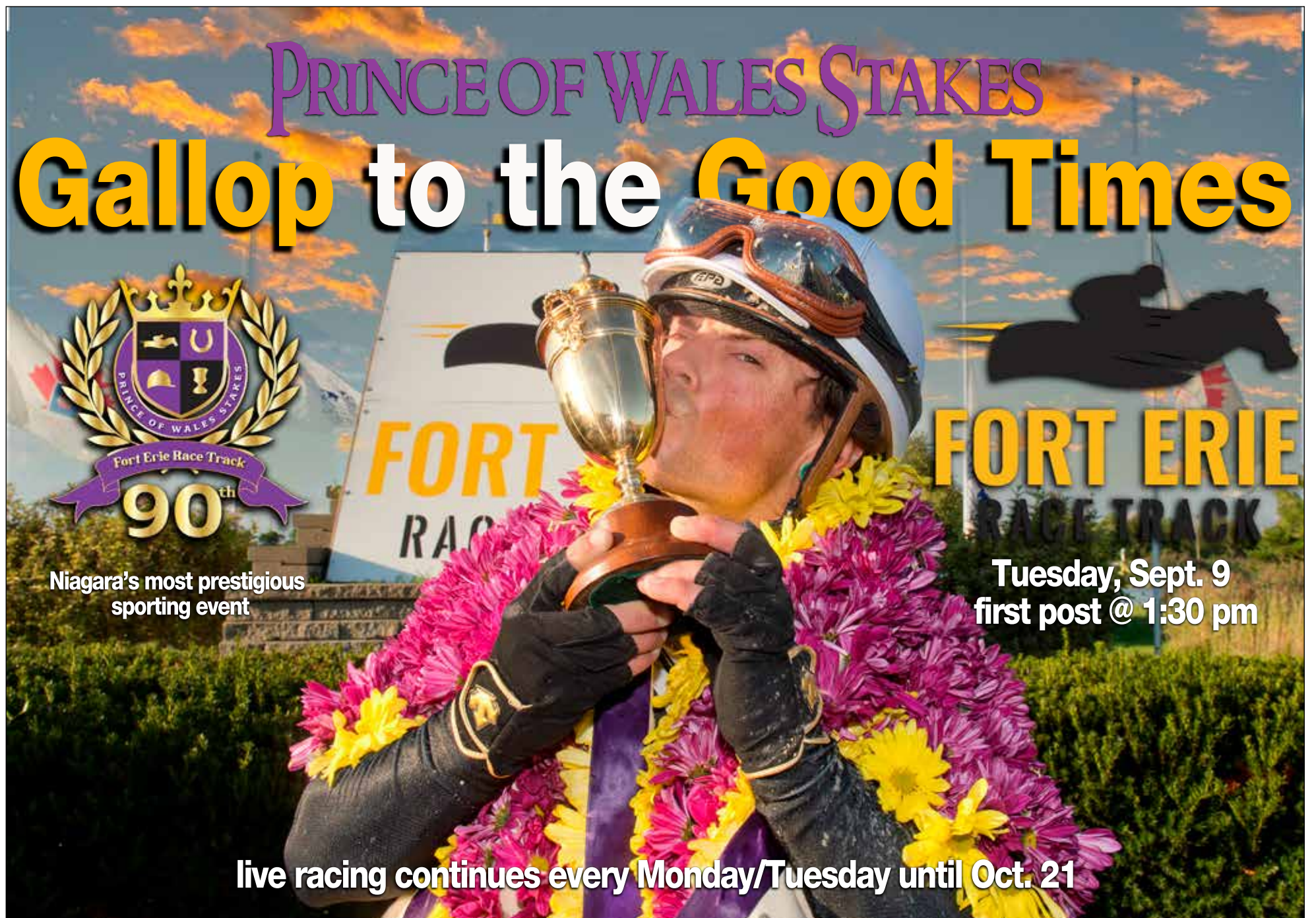
Anand Sundaresan took over the role as of Aug. 1. He brings with him a "wealth of global experience across the chemicals, life sciences, and agricultural sectors," according to a press release announcing the appointment.

He has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, along with a master's in environmental engineering from Texas A&M and a bachelor's in chemical engineering from Karnataka Regional Engineering College in India.

"An aligned organization is built on the foundation of leadership, management, and culture. That means having a clear purpose and strategy, setting priorities and measuring outcomes, and fostering a culture of collaboration and this is what I want to pursue with the Trouw Nutrition North America team," he said in the release.

He's had leadership roles at Green Plains Inc., as well as senior positions at DSM-Firmenich and Dow Chemical.

Trouw's brands include Shur-Gain, Hi-Pro, NutriOpt, Milkiwean and Selko.



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Simcoe summit seeks a unified voice for supporting migrant workers and employers



Mexican consular services head Rodrigo Baez discusses summit detail with staffer Esel Panlaqui.



Rodrigo Baez is head consul the Mexican Embassy's consular services in Leamington.



Hugo Velazquez Vazquez of British Columbia was a major collaborator at the Simcoe summit.

By Diane Baltaz

Multiple front-line people who interact with seasonal workers across Canada gathered in Simcoe mid-June in order to strengthen services for migrant workers and develop better interprovincial supports.

Dubbed as the National and Provincial Summit on Migrant Workers Services Delivery Model and Road Map, it was primarily organized by the Toronto Neighbourhood Association (TNO), a community-based agency. Since 2006, TNO has supported many of Norfolk County's approximately 6,000 annual migrant workers from an office in the Simcoe Mall on West Street.

The two-day conference involved service providers, academics, politicians, interpreters, employers, consulate staff as well as frontline workers from health services, faith-based agencies, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, and the Canadian government's Migrant Worker Support Program. Consulate officials represented Mexico, Jamaica, Barbados, Guatemala and Thailand. They outlined their role in supporting their nationals who work in Canada.

After sharing information about what works and existing problems on the first day, summit participants strategized on fostering a "road map" on ways to strengthen "accessible and relevant" services for workers and their employers.

In Norfolk County, this means supporting agricultural workers, said Mayor Amy Martin in an introductory address. She said that one-third of Ontario's seasonal workers land in Norfolk to work on many of its 1,400-plus farms.

"Farmers can scale more and earlier produce and such production isn't possible without seasonal farm workers....I thank every person who steps on a farm to help produce vegetables and fruit in light of an unstable world."

Martin cited examples of community assistance for these workers, such as bunkhouse

inspections, housing compliance, rural transportation services, and the Grand-Erie Health Services which provides full medical services to workers at permanent sites in Simcoe and Delhi and with two mobile vans. Much of this work is done in collaboration with TNO, she added.

The conversations on Day One revealed that existing migrant worker services across Canada and within provinces have services that could be adapted to other regions. They also learned that while the overall service system works, glitches remain.

"Small problems can create big problems if not solved in time," said Rodrigo Baez, who heads the consular section of the Mexican Embassy in Leamington.

Baez cited examples of complaints his consular office received such as housing standards that vary across provinces, heat stress, obtaining health cards (it can take up to six months in another province), and opening bank accounts.

"There are mental health problems; Ontario helped with (a workers') hotline but some workers remain helpless – they can't access it if they have a phone from Mexico," said Baez. "Mexico is the number one country sending migrant workers to Canada and our government supports them."

Summit documentation called for "better cross-provincial alignment on core service standards and shared principles to support consistent service delivery."

Several Canadian and consular officials outlined the confusing services documentation which employers and newly-landed workers receive; information about support services and the appropriate provider has been misinterpreted across Canada, they allege.

"We need a consistent document as workers off the plane may receive conflicting information from what their employers or the (migrant workers support) hub gets," said Hugo Velazquez Vazquez, who directs British

Columbia's Family and Settlement programs for MOSAIC (Multi-Lingual Orientation Services Association for Immigrant Communities). "The information is not necessarily wrong but it's said in 10,000 ways. Let's make everybody's lives easier -- and try to do this across Canada as it's a common issue."

Fernando Borja of FERME, a Quebec service provider fascinated the attendees with his association's "one voice" success for better government support at provincial roundtables. He said that migrant worker support organizations, consulates, employers and ethnic communities developed a common front for approaching the government for reforms and tailoring services to specific sectors and regions.

"We have one voice now," said Borja. "Before everyone had their own agenda but they needed the influence to get points across. When you have one voice and everybody is together saying it, it's easier to get thing done or for the government to act."

The resulting improved cross-sector coordination and strengthened alignments enabled a new program in 2022 that provide "simplified information for workers and training workers."

The pandemic highlighted and corrected some deficiencies in migrant worker support systems in Canada beginning with Velazquez Vazquez's blunt statement, "The first COVID outbreak amongst Mexicans didn't happen in Mexico but in British Columbia."

But threats of post-pandemic political instability, tariffs against some Canadian products and possible future Canadian food insecurity were undercurrent throughout the discussions.

"Tariffs may mean food insecurity," said Velazquez Vazquez. "Try to sell your best services to your MP and MLA about your migrant workers' situation during tariffs. Migrant workers don't change things as they don't vote, but their employers do... Become one voice to reach out to the authorities that in a time of tariffs, food insecurity is threatening." 🌱

Technology highlighted at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show

By Tamara Botting

Canada's Outdoor Farm Show – the largest and oldest of its kind in Ontario – is returning to the Woodstock area September 9 to 11.

The show has been going for over 30 years. Each year, over 36,000 people and more than 650 exhibitors are in attendance.

"The primary purpose (of the show) is for companies to showcase products that are ready to come to market now," said Rob O'Connor, show director.

"There's also companies starting to showcase prototypes and concepts and new business start-ups that are coming, to bring the products to give the first glimpse of them to farmers. They engage the interest of the farmers, and get some of their feedback," he said. "We will have some new startup companies in there with some new technological advancements that they want to bring to the market; these are so new that there's not even a business built around some of them – it's just still a concept."

The benefit, O'Connor said, is that these companies are able to find out directly from their potential future customers whether or not theirs is a product farmers would be interested in buying at all, as well as how many farmers might be interested in buying it – whether the product is niche or should be mass produced.

"They monitor that acceptance level of the product, and it's very helpful for the companies," O'Connor said. "It's also very helpful for the farmers, because then they can start thinking as to the future and what they need to be prepared for," as far as whether this is something they want to invest in for their enterprise.

O'Connor noted that there have been expansive technological ad-



Each year, Canada's Outdoor Farm Show attracts an average of 70,000-plus people from across Ontario, throughout Canada, the United States and beyond.

vances in agricultural equipment in the past five to 10 years.

He said there have been "remarkable improvements in some of the technology on the equipment, whether it's sensor-driven technology to help the operator understand if something's getting jammed, or how fast the harvest is going, how much (produce) they're putting through the machine."

The improved productivity can be quantified almost immediately.

"There's lots of new sensors and digital technologies that we're able to use to help us record, whether it's volumes and yields, or monitoring equipment in real time as you're operating it," O'Connor said.

There have been significant technological advances for livestock management as well, and the show makes sure there's a space for those producers to learn about what's new on the market as well.

"Our dairy improvement centre has been there for over 20 years, and that's an area where farmers

can come and see what's new in the dairy industry," O'Connor said.

Oftentimes, there are equipment demonstrations at the show, so farmers can get a first-hand look at how these new tools work.

This year, one of the planned equipment demonstrations is for forage harvesters.

"It's a great opportunity for farmers, whether they're dairy farmers or beef cattle producers, to come out and see some of the newest technology when it comes to harvesting and storing their forage crops," O'Connor said.

"The great thing about having these shows is it really does highlight that technology that helps the production of agriculture become more efficient, and to grow more food safer and more efficiently, with less cost to the environment."

O'Connor noted that agriculture as a whole is a fairly niche industry.

"It's very few people in the business compared to the general population. But everybody eats."

He noted that only about two to four per cent of the population is involved in agriculture, and of that segment, about 20 per cent of them do the largest volume of growing agricultural products, such as corn, soybeans, beef, pork, poultry, etc.

"It's a very small amount of people that feed everybody else. In fact, Canada can feed three more countries' worth of population over and above we do for Canada; that just makes for a very large business," O'Connor said.

Over time, the technology has improved and farming has become more efficient. While there is always going to be a need for the next generation of farmers, the labour demands haven't grown exponentially in pace with the population growth, because farmers are better equipped – literally – to keep up with the demands of their operations.

"Because of that, we've been able to keep our food production costs lower for people," O'Connor said.

Agriculture as an industry can face a lot of scrutiny from the general public, particularly when it comes to concerns about the environmental impacts of farming practices.

But as O'Connor noted, it's only in a farmer's own best interests to be environmentally responsible.

"We have to look after our land, because that's our livelihood. No farmer, no business (owner) is going to ruin their business. And I think that gets forgotten by a lot of people – how much importance (farmers) place on their land, their farm. They want to make sure it's not just good for them, but it'll be good for those who take it over, whether it's their own family, or it's other people who purchase the farm in the future."

With the rising cost of land – particularly land that's suitable for agriculture – it just makes good financial sense for a farmer to take good care of their land, and make sure it remains viable for their operation.

The same care and concern extends to the livestock, for the same reasoning.

"You have to have good, healthy animals to produce good meat, eggs or milk. So, to do that, you have to look after them the best way," O'Connor said.

It also just makes financial sense for farmers to be conservative when they're using resources like fuel, fertilizer, herbicides, etc.

"All of this creates a cost to their business that they really want to reduce and avoid," O'Connor said. "They really monitor what they're putting into the soil or into their animals, because it's just an extra cost as well. And then, if you put

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Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show scheduled for Sept. 9-11

too much of something into the land, it'll just leech off anyways, and it's lost potential revenue for you."

The Canadian Outdoor Farm Show and others like it help farmers learn about practices and tools that can help them thrive.

That's why O'Connor loves the work he does.

"It really is more than just a job to me; it's a way of life. It is something that I really enjoy doing. I don't see myself ever doing any other type of job other than promoting agriculture, promoting technology through this type of event."

He has a ranch, and is the third generation in his family to farm cattle. He's been in agricultural trade shows and fairs for a long time.

It was just over 12 years ago that he started in his current position with Glacier FarmMedia.

"I was asked if I'd be interested in working with their team to start up a new outdoor agriculture trade show in the Prairies. I said yes, because that's once in a lifetime opportunity, to start a major event from the ground up," O'Connor said.

That show is Ag in Motion, which runs in July each year near Langton, SK. The Ontario show, which has been operating for over

30 years and is owned by Glacier FarmMedia, came under O'Connor's purview a few years ago.

O'Connor said he appreciates the loyal attendees who make it a point to come out every year.

For the Ontario show, "I think we have a 65 per cent return rate of attendees, which is phenomenal for a trade show."

Besides being a way to help farmers improve their businesses, it's also an important social support for them, O'Connor said.

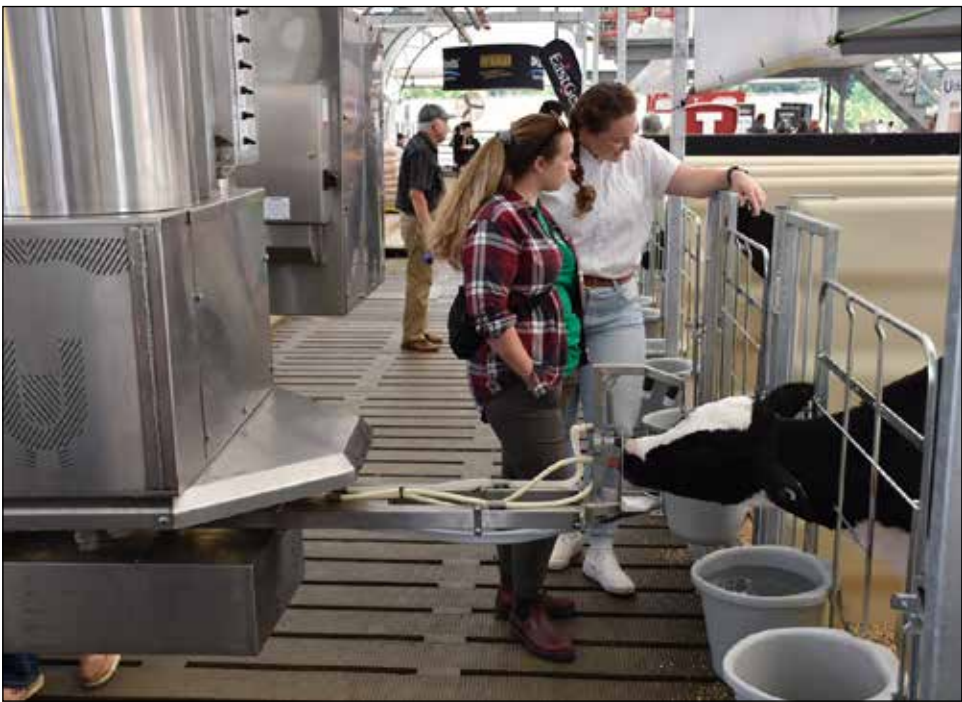
Seeing old friends reconnect and new relationships form each year at the show, "It's one of those things that I look forward to," he said.

Beyond that, September is just a great time to travel to the area, he said.

"That time of year in Ontario is so beautiful ... everything's so green and lush; it's just before the harvest of corn crops and soybeans, the crops are really looking good."

As the Ontario show rapidly approaches, O'Connor and his team are feverishly working in the background on a new program they're launching this year, Agriculture for Indigenous Youth.

The idea is to highlight not just the production side of agriculture,



The Dairy Farmers of Ontario tent at the Outdoor Farm Show is always a popular spot for people of all ages. Besides information on the latest technology, the cows are a big draw.

but also the industry of the business, which touches on many areas, including banking, equipment manufacturing, large animal veterinary services, and more.

"Agriculture is really quite a diverse business, but most people just think of farming," O'Connor said. "So, what we want to do is, we want to bring the Indigenous youth to our show and introduce them to all that's offered in agriculture."

"It's something we're building right now, and we're pretty excited about it. I personally think the next decade for that is going to become very important, so we're beyond thrilled, to be honest, to be the first agricultural trade shows to be offering this."

For more information about the show, or to get tickets, visit outdoorfarmshow.com. 🌱

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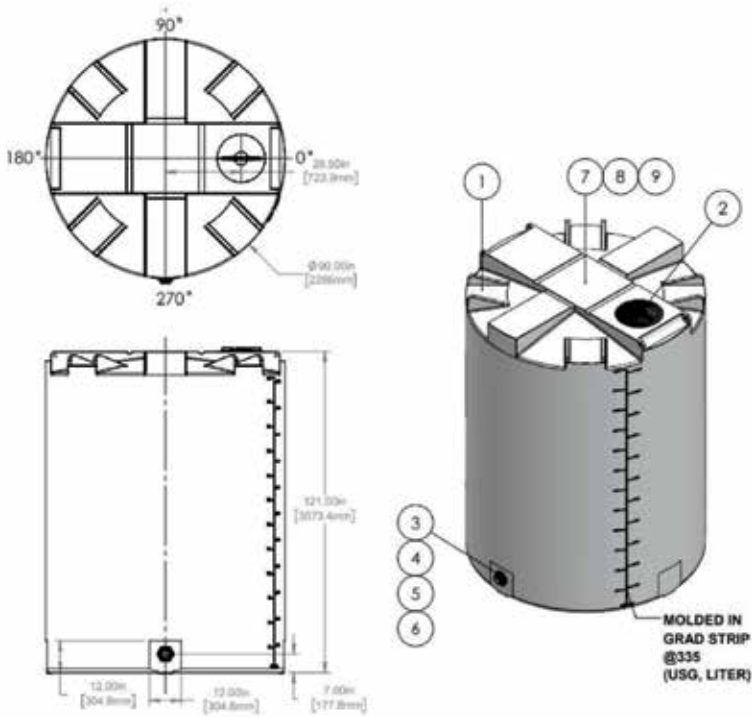
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