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ISSUE 31 / OCTOBER 2026



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A grand champion



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STIHL HONDA

Farming has been in new Grape King's blood since day 1

By Luke Edwards

In a year that's been full of difficult surprises for local farmers, from economic uncertainty and wild weather, one Niagara-on-the-Lake grape grower last month received a most welcome surprise.

Steve Pohorly was named the newest Grape King, joining an exclusive list of grape growers who have helped create and shape Ontario's grape and wine industry. As his family welcomed industry members, friends, family and a football legend to their farm, outgoing Grape King Augusta Van Muyen handed over the chains to Pohorly, officially installing him as the new Grape King.

"It was a shock, a surprise, and a great honour," said Pohorly.

Running Riverbend Farm in Virgil, the family maintains about 50 acres of farmland, including 30 acres of premium wine grapes. While they came from farm families, Steve's parents, Frank and Susan, struck out on their own and established the farm in 1971.

It started as primarily fruit, with an orchard and pick-your-own strawberries. Pohorly recalled helping out as a child at the check-out counter, where his parents

taught him the business side of farming.

But joking he was born with John Deere gear in tow, Pohorly said the farming life has always been his passion.

"Farming has been in my blood since day one," he said.

While they've transitioned to begin focusing on grapes, they still grow a mixture of fruits that harkens back to their days operating the Fruit Shack market and bakery.

Riverbend has a longstanding partnership with Arterra Wines, going back to when they were known as Brights Wines, and today supply local wineries like Inniskillin and Jackson-Triggs.

While calling it an honour to be named Grape King, Pohorly said the support of family, friends and staff have made all the difference. He singled out the three offshore workers who have been longtime returnees.

"They care just as much about our farm's success as we do," he said.

Still, others were quick to sing Pohorly's praises. Matt Peters, of new Grape King sponsor NM Bartlett, called the Pohorlys wonderful people.



GGO chair Kevin Watson talks about the new Grape King and the industry in general. ~ Luke Edwards photos

"(Steve) puts himself out there to do what he can for his community," Peters said. "And he still has time to grow some good grapes."

Pohorly has served as a GGO director for nearly 20 years, sits on the board of the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, and participates in many industry committees and research groups. Beyond farming, he is dedicated to youth sports,

coaching and supporting NOTL minor hockey, where his son plays, as well as his daughter Maelle's softball team.

Looking ahead, Pohorly said he's excited to take part in the trip to the Okanagan Valley, an annual tradition for the Grape King as they get to tour that wine region and learn from its local grape growers and winemakers.

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NIAGARA FARMS

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Former Grape King Augusta Van Muyen helps new king Steve Pohorly put on the Grape King jacket during his installation last month.



Michael "Pinball" Clemons, who earlier that day was the celebrity speaker at the GGO luncheon, shares a laugh with new Grape King Steve Pohorly as the current and former Grape Kings pose for a photo.

Front page photo: Niagara's grape and wine industry celebrated the newest Grape King, Steve Pohorly, who was installed last month. He's pictured here with wife Breanne and children Maelle and Harrison. ~ Luke Edwards photo



Steve Pohorly joined an exclusive club as he became the newest Grape King. Many of the former kings were on hand for his installation. ~ Luke Edwards photo

→ **Continued from page A3**
He'll also spend the year championing the industry at various events and helping advocate for more support. He and others said

resilience helps define the grape and wine sector.
"We do our very best with whatever curveballs are thrown our way," he said.
Pohorly likewise echoed comments made earlier in the day at

the GGO celebrity luncheon that featured a presentation from CFL legend Michael "Pinball" Clemons about the value of teamwork.
"Every bottle of Niagara wine must be great, for all of us to thrive," Pohorly said.

At the same time he encouraged Ontario wine drinkers to stock their cellars with local bottles.
"Keep reaching for Ontario wines, explore it, and you'll be pleasantly surprised," he said. 🍷

Grape growers get a jolt of positivity from Pinball

By Luke Edwards
In a room full of people who had homes flooded and crops on the verge of ruin thanks to a series of summer storms, it was perhaps no better time to have a Pinball pep talk.
And that's exactly what attendees to the annual Grape Growers of Ontario celebrity luncheon got last month. With his trademark smile, impeccable style, and Energizer Bunny energy, Michael "Pinball" Clemons bounced from table to table, sharing stories of inspiration and infecting the crowd with his unique positivity.

"Sometimes you've got to lose enough to win," he said, taking lessons he's learned from a lifetime in the Canadian Football League, and applying it to grape growers who often face economic and weather challenges beyond their control.
"You are subject to all this stuff and you've got to figure it out," he said.
And much like how each member of a football team must rely on their teammates, farmers do the same.
"We are better together, and you get that," he said.



This year's Grape Growers of Ontario celebrity luncheon was high energy from start to finish, as Michael "Pinball" Clemons brought his signature smile and positivity to the annual event. He's pictured here raising the hand of GGO chair Kevin Watson. ~ Luke Edwards photo

Continued to page A5 →

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→ **Continued from page 4**

At times Pinball's presentation seemed more like a huddle between plays as he wrapped an arm around the shoulder of someone and offered words of encouragement. At other times he got the entire audience in on the act, having them give themselves a standing ovation, or shouting a call and response.

Clemons, who grew up in a single family home and later became a CFL legend, said his success is the result of the people around him, like his mom, family, friends and teammates. He's been on Grey Cup winning teams as a player and in management, has won several awards and holds a few records, but despite that his humbleness shone through.

"I owe my success to the many people around me," he said, often making jokes about his diminutive size.

For Clemons, though, success isn't measured by awards, wealth, fame, or power.

"If you want to show me a truly great person, show me what that person has done for someone else," he said.

And as grape growers face what could be a challenging year depending on how the rest of the fall plays out, Clemons was reminded of some of his own professional trials and tribulations. For instance, the last two Grey Cup victories for his Toronto Argonauts, in 2024 and 2022, came after regular seasons where they struggled at times, barely playing over .500. Yet those losses weren't just losses, they were learning experiences.

The GGO celebrity luncheon kicked off the annual Grape and Wine Festival, now in its 75th year. The day also featured the installation of new Grape King Steve Pohorly.

Organizers also honoured Sandra Easton and Gary Zalepa, outgoing mayors of Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake, respectively, for their advocacy of the grape and wine sector. They additionally made a donation to Community Crew, while Clemons offered to pay for 31 kids to go to camp. His number during his playing days was 31. NM Bartlett, who has come on as Grape King sponsor this year, doubled down, offering to pay for another 30 kids to go to camp. 🍀



It was GGO senior policy advisor Nick Lemieux whose persistence helped bring Pinball Clemons to the GGO luncheon, and Clemons returned the favour by carrying him up to the front for a round of applause. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Lemieux shares a smile with Pinball Clemons at the end of the GGO luncheon.

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BEFORE



AFTER



An 'incredible opportunity': Niagara West MPP becomes provincial ag minister

By Luke Edwards

The Province's newest agriculture minister may have grown up in a farm family in one of the most fertile parts of Ontario, but Sam Oosterhoff said he's not taking anything for granted.

A cabinet shakeup by Premier Doug Ford last month saw a promotion for the Niagara West MPP, who was named Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. He takes over from Trevor Jones, who was moved to the Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development portfolio.

"Coming from a family with a dad who's a farmer and whose brothers are farmers, and working on the pork farm as a kid myself, it's just a really incredible opportunity to be able to serve the people I love," he said.

Oosterhoff said he spent his first days as minister absorbing as much information as possible, and plans to continue to do that in the coming weeks and months. While he comes from a farming community and a farming family, the new minister was quick to point out he's not the expert and doesn't want to make all his decisions from his office in Queen's Park.



Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff was recently named the Province's new Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. He's pictured here with Premier Doug Ford at last year's International Plowing Match in Niagara. ~ Submitted photo

"I believe in getting out and meeting with people who know the sector and learning from them directly, recognizing that I don't

know nearly as much as people who have worked in this space, and who have the experience and expertise that I'm going to be relying on," he said.

Some of his priorities may come as no surprise. At the top of his list is continuing the work to make Ontario's ag and food sector more resilient in the face of tariffs and the trade war launched by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"I think there's a lot of growth potential right now, especially in an era where we have, of course, a lot of geopolitical instability and trade challenges, which can be alarming, but also present opportunities for more domestic food processing, domestic consumption," he said.

Beyond that he said he wants to make sure "government moves faster when it comes to permits, when it comes to reducing red tape and getting out of the way of entrepreneurs and visionaries."

Finally, Oosterhoff said he wants to simply offer his support to farmers, and do what his ministry and government can to reduce costs

and make life more affordable. At the same time he said he wants to see investments in areas that will grow opportunities for the ag sector, from market diversification to food processing sector development.

Locally, Oosterhoff said the ongoing irrigation projects in Niagara and Leamington will be top of mind, and he offered his support in ensuring they continue to progress.

"We have an incredible group of tender fruit growers, an incredible group of farmers with high value lands, high value commodities per acre, especially below the escarpment, so to see that project come to fruition and hopefully be able support it along the way, both with the \$41 million but also through sort of shepherding it through the government processes is going to be something I'll be staying on top of for sure," he said, referring to funding announced last year for the irrigation projects in Niagara and Leamington. 🌱

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A double win for first time homecraft entrant

By Ann Marie Chechalk

The Vooys family has been volunteering at the West Niagara Fair for several years. Marlene Vooys is now in charge of the photography section, helping to select the classes and assisting the judge on judging day. She also sponsors "The Jar Wrangler" class in the canning section.

Now being familiar with the Homecraft classes, "I thought it would be fun to enter, plus my family were the ones to encourage me, as my son Stephen said I have the best coffee cake. It was very much a surprise when I won," she said.

"I actually started baking in elementary school in a home economics class. I was in Grade 6, so it's been a few years. I only entered my coffee cake and the angel food cake and I won first with both cakes this year."

Vooys takes home \$150 for her angel food cake, sponsored by the Niagara Egg Producers. Her coffee cake earned her \$50 and was sponsored and enjoyed by All Canadian Entertainment.

"I really don't know what the secret is, and I just enjoy baking," she said. Her cake was judged based on 50 points for flavour, smell and taste; 25 points for texture and lightness inside the cake; and 25 points for overall appearance, surface, size and colour. 🌱



Marlene Vooys won awards for both her coffee cake and angel food cake at the West Niagara Fair. ~ Ann Marie Chechalk photo

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The animals steal the show at the West Niagara Fair

By Luke Edwards

As the goat plucked a bit of hay from Penelope Duffie-Edgar’s hand, the young Wellandport girl’s face lit up with joy.

The goat was one of several in pens at the West Niagara Fair. Not too far behind her competitors were taking part in one of the shows, but for Duffie-Edgar, the interaction was perfect.

“We come every year,” said mom Heather Vaughan. “(Our favourite is) probably the animals. She loves visiting all the animals.”

The fair returned, as always, to Grassie the weekend after Labour Day. And despite it being after the unofficial end to summer, Mother Nature shone down with summerlike conditions.

Animals were the stars of the show for many. The fair is also a tradition for Isla Moskal and her Stoney Creek family. She loves the animals, too, but more specifically the horses.

“I like to ride on the ponies,” she said, shortly after taking a few laps around the pen on one such pony.

But as always, there was far more to do beyond visit with the four-legged friends. The

Martin family from Smithville enjoyed some of the rides at the Midway. Others challenged their competitive spirit with pie-eating contests for the adults and doughnut-eating competitions for the kids.

At the other end of the fairgrounds tractor owners competed in the tractor pull, and as the sun came down drivers crashed into each other in the demolition derby.

Fair organizers thanked everyone who participated in this year’s event, from the sponsors and vendors, to the volunteers, entertainers, and of course, everyone who visited. 🍃



Isla Moskal goes for a pony ride. ~ Luke Edwards photos



Barnyard animals of all kinds were at the fair, giving visitors a chance to get up close with calves, pigs, goats and more.



The West Niagara Fair featured various 4-H achievement days and competitions.



A chicken looks for a bite to eat.



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The tractor pull is always one of the favourite events at the West Niagara Fair.



Penelope Duffie-Edgar had fun feeding the goats at the West Niagara Fair.



The Martin family - Sophia, Lisa and Brianna - had a thrill going down the slide at the West Niagara Fair's midway.



The West Niagara Fair got a little messy when kids took part in the doughnut eating competition.



A young rider takes her horse through the paces.



Kids loved taking a tour through the fairgrounds with the help of the Niagara Antique Power Association.



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All things fair and fowl with the poultry club

By Jessie Rooker

The West Niagara Fair 4-H Poultry Show was a wonderful opportunity for our members to showcase their birds, demonstrate their knowledge, and share their passion for poultry with the community.

We were pleased to welcome our judge, John Miles, who travelled from New Kent, Virginia. John is a licensed APA (American Poultry Association) and ABA (American Bantam Association) judge, and we greatly appreciate him taking the time to join us and share his expertise with our members.

Our showmen demonstrated excellent knowledge and care of their birds throughout the show. They also took the time both before and after showing to interact with

fairgoers, answer questions, and tell others about their birds and our 4-H poultry club. These interactions are an important part of what makes agricultural education and exhibition so valuable.

A special thank you goes to the Niagara Feather Fanciers Club for setting up and providing a wonderful poultry show for our members to exhibit in. Their support gave our 4-H members an excellent opportunity to gain valuable show experience in a quality exhibition setting.

We are proud to be involved in helping develop the next generation of poultry exhibitors and breeders, and we look forward to continuing to provide our youth with opportunities to learn, compete, and share their passion for poultry with the community. 🌱



The 4-H poultry show at the West Niagara Fair was a great opportunity for members to showcase everything they've learned, as well as the birds they've cared so deeply for this year. ~ Submitted photos

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No pirates and parrots here, instead a 4-H member offers a place to rest for one of his birds.



There were birds of every type and colour at the 4-H poultry show.

Crafty and creative



The winner of the Most Creative 4-H Craft Club Member Special, donated by Sharon McMillan, was won by Emily McGee for her planter box, wood piece barn quilt and bird house. ~ Submitted photo

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Sheep champs



Comfort Sheep (David, Shauna and Adam Comfort) were awarded Supreme Champion Ewe with their Dorset Ewe Lamb and Supreme Champion Flock with their Dorset flock at the West Niagara Fair. ~ Submitted photos



Young Livestock (Jim Young) was awarded Supreme Champion Ram with his Oxford Ram.



The Novice Sheep show also had a wonderful morning with three brand new showmen entering the ring. L to right Andy Davis, Adam Comfort and Nathan Cousineau.

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A calm Kelly was key to victory

Emily Kelly ekes out competitors in the 4-H grand champion contest

By Ann Marie Chechalk

After a spring and summer of preparing for the show ring, 4-H members from the Niagara Goat Club, Lincoln Dairy Club, Niagara Beef Club and the Niagara Poultry Club were well equipped for the Grand Champion Showperson Competition.

The event happens after each club's Achievement Day at the West Niagara Fair. The top showman from each club is the representative for this auspicious challenge. The winner of the competition receives a trophy sponsored and created by Frankie's Goats, (Scott and Joanne Battersby and family) and Fine-Line Woodwork and Design Inc (Jeff and Tricia DeBoer and family).

To achieve the status of Grand Champion Showman each member must show an animal from all the different clubs and be judged on a score out of 50 with a variety of judges. A member may only win this competition once showing the same breed of animal. Members may compete again showing a different breed.

With many anxious parents and siblings and 4-H leaders in the audience, they began showing the beef calves, goats, birds, and dairy calves.

The competition took place this year on Friday evening Sept. 11 in the Richardson Building at the West Niagara Fair. Hailey Dawson from the Beef Club, Emily Kelly from the Goat Club, Hadessah Lodewyk from the Poultry Club, and Kaylee Hart of the Lincoln Dairy Club were

all pleased and excited to show off their showmanship skills.

After a very long day of showing in their achievement programs and then handling tired and strong willed animals these showmen were still in excellent form and tried their best with animals and ring procedures.

The results were tabulated while anxious parents, friends and competitors waited for the outcome. The Grand Champion Showperson for 2026 must be congratulated for confidence in the show ring. Emily Kelly was very pleased to accept the title and the trophy from Jeff DeBoer.

"I knew how to show the poultry, as we have chickens at home, I think that helped me. I also stayed calm when the goat I was showing jumped up several times," she said.

Coordinator Jonathan Dugdale said, "All competitors did an outstanding job. As well, all competitors scored incredibly well. All scores are kept secret and never revealed."

Equally impressive as the winning of the trophy was the good sportsmanship of the other members who smiled, and congratulated Kelly on her win. A job well done!

There was some jumping and whooping from the goat club members and leaders who were watching.

Previous winners in the past 25 years (two are missing due to the COVID-19 pandemic): 2000 - Caroline Vaughan, Dairy Club; 2001 - April Grabell, Beef Club; 2002 - Laura McDougall, Dairy Club; 2003 - Justin Evans, Dairy Club; 2004 - Stephanie Forbes, Mini Horse Club; 2005 - Nicole Famelos, Mini Horse Club; 2006



Judges and showmen from the Grand Champion Showmanship Competition that took place at the West Niagara Fair on Friday, Sept. 11, front from left: Jessie Rooker, Hadessah Lodewyk, Emily Kelly, Hailey Dawson, and Greta Haupt. Behind: Collin Allardyce, Jonathan Dugdale. ~ Ann Marie Chechalk photos



Emily Kelly excitedly accepts the Grand Champion Showmanship trophy from sponsor Jeff DeBoer.

- Katie Young, Mini Horse Club; 2007 - Andrew Chechalk, Goat Club; 2008 - Janice Zijlstra, Mini Horse Club; 2009 - Karen Booker, Beef Club; 2010 - Sophie Butler, Mini Horse Club; 2011 - Andrew Chechalk, Beef Club; 2012 - Katie Chechalk, Goat Club; 2013 - Christine Armstrong, Lincoln Dairy Club; 2014 - Ashley Young, Lincoln Dairy

Goat Club; 2016 - Josiah Lodewyk, Goat Club; 2017 - Stacey Leppert, Lincoln Dairy Club; 2018 - Jessica Raffaele, Niagara Mini Horse Club; 2019 - Ali Campigotto, Niagara Beef Club; 2023 - Morgan McGee, Niagara Goat Club; 2024 - Tyler Gilbert, Niagara Cavy Club; 2025 - Emily McGee, Niagara Goat Club.

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Club; 2015 - Jonathan Dugdale,

Goat club members show off their skills

By Ann Marie Chechalk

On Friday, Sept. 11 members of the Niagara 4-H Goat Club were welcomed to the West Niagara Fair for their achievement day. A great crowd of parents, siblings and grandparents came out to cheer on these young people.

Judge Irene Farrow, of Rockwood, Ontario, is a goat breeder, showman and judge. She was pleased to come to Niagara. Her calm and smiling face enabled the members to relax somewhat in the showing.

Novice members were still a bit nervous, noted by how quickly they walked around the show ring and how they had a tendency to line up close to one another, leaving little space for the judge to walk around the goats and showmen.

As the show progressed with junior, intermediate and senior members the calmness was noted as the showmen were attentive to the judge and led well trained animals who walked slowly.

Judge Farrow made sure the novice, junior, intermediate and senior members knew the

goat's breed and age and that the members had been working with their goats all summer so that they were well trained for the show ring.

Farrow made the 4-H members work very hard before choosing the winners. Members were asked to manoeuvre their animals from place to place and to change animals with each other. This ensured that the goats were familiar with being handled and not by just one person. Moving throughout the show ring she was watching to see who moved their animals smoothly, kept their eyes on the judge and set up their animal quickly and calmly.

The Novice showmanship was very competitive as a group of very well trained goats and well-dressed showmen were ready for anything the judge would ask them. Becky Gunn placed first and Cecilia Srigley placed second.

In Junior Showmanship, members were nervous but very attentive to the judge, placing first was Katie Gunn and second Jack Kelly.

In Intermediate Showmanship the smooth and calm skills placed Jack Kelly first and second was Hadessah Lodewyk.

Seniors saw the experience of Morgan McGee placing first and Emily McGee second.

Returning to the show ring the top winners of each class competed for Rosettes and the honour of being Grand Champion Goat Showperson at the Achievement program. Morgan, Emily McGee and Emily Kelly received the honours that day. Morgan had previously won the title of Grand Champion Showperson so the Honorable Mention Showman Emily Kelly would go on to represent the goat club for Grand Champion Showman later in the evening.

"The members were all previously schooled on showing techniques and their animals were impeccably presented. The show was very organized. Congratulations on a job well done," commented Farrow.

Thanks go out to all the parents, and families that encouraged the young showmen and to the West Niagara Fair for sponsoring the classes. 🌿



Becky Gunn and Cecilia Srigley placed first and second in the Novice Goat Club Class at the Niagara 4-h Goat Club Achievement Day, held at the West Niagara Fair. ~ Ann Marie Chechalk photos



Katie Gunn and Aiden Vooy placed first and second in the Junior Goat Club Class at the Niagara 4-H Goat Club Achievement Day, held at the West Niagara Fair.



Jack Kelly and Hadessah Lodewyk placed first and second in the Intermediate Class at the Niagara 4-H Goat Club Achievement Day, held at the West Niagara Fair.



Morgan McGee, Emily McGee and Emily Kelly were champion, reserve and honourable mention, respectively, at the Niagara 4-H Goat Club Achievement Day held at the West Niagara Fair.

Shake, shake, shake



This year the Niagara 4-H Association sold their popular food booth. But fortunately the West Niagara Agricultural Society welcomed the popular milkshakes to be made in the kitchen of the Richardson Building for special events. The West Niagara Fair saw many happy people finding the milkshakes still available. Brad VanMarrum enjoyed a strawberry milkshake as the first customer and as one of their best customers over the years. ~ Submitted photo

Full of colour



On display at the West Niagara Fair, the Niagara 4-H Junior Craft club decorated this colourful wall with bird houses, birds, flowers and butterflies. Underneath the tree were all the plant boxes the members created. ~ Submitted photo

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AT THE MARKET

Crunch is key for Ridgeway pickle producers

By Luke Edwards

A Ridgeway greenhouse has traded chrysanthemums for cucumbers.

Harvest Ridge Farm, based out of Ridgeway, began selling their pickled goods last year after transitioning out of the flower business. With greenhouse space available and cucumbers making an ideal vegetable to grow indoors, the Taras family reimagined their business. Margo Taras, who helps run the business with her sister and parents, said they wanted to focus on food, and pickles made for an interesting option.

"They last a year on the shelf. So they last long and it's a more stable market. It's not like four months of just trying to sell everything," she said, referring to the old flower business.

They can be found at three south Niagara farmers markets: at Stevensville on Wednesdays, Port Colborne on Fridays, and Ridgeway on Saturdays. For Taras, meeting with people and convincing them to take home a jar, or simply just chatting, makes the market visits a treat.

Of course, the free samples help. At a recent Port Colborne market, it only took a quick taste



Margo Taras helps run Harvest Ridge Farm with her sister and parents in Ridgeway. They sell pickled goods at three local markets: Port Colborne, Stevensville and Ridgeway. ~ Luke Edwards photo

of the sauerkraut for one couple to scoop up a jar.

Taras' favourite is the classic dill pickle, though she also enjoys their pickled beets. They also have sweet chili and bread and butter

pickles, along with sauerkraut and sweet kraut.

Taras said when it comes to pickled foods, the range of opinions can vary far and wide. But one key to ensuring a good pickle is to make sure it has some crunch to it. From there, it just depends

on what flavour profile a customer prefers.

Beyond the markets, Harvest Ridge Farm has been working to get into local stores in recent months, including Bodner's, Pupo's and Minor Bros. 🌿

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

All of a sudden, autumn is here

By Michelle Seaborn

The season changes often creep up, a few cooler days then back to warm.

For some, autumn is their favourite time of the year. Cooler mornings, warm afternoons, temperatures that give that extra bit of energy to clean out vegetable patches or prepare some plants for the seasons ahead.

Then one day you realize that you can't get quite as much done outdoors as you could a couple of weeks ago, the mornings are pleasantly cool, and the grass is covered in dew. And before you know it grapes are being harvested, final cuts of hay are down and ready for baling, many fields are getting ready for a winter cover crop or are cut down for the cold weather ahead.

At farmers markets apples will make a full appearance. With tons of varieties now available in Ontario, many people will be trying out some of the new varieties or returning for their favourites. Apple cider, apple pie and other apple pastries will be in high demand. Pears, everbearing strawberries, plums and melons will round out the fruit basket.

But it doesn't stop there. Many vendors will be decorating their booths with corn stalks, colourful gourds, pumpkins and squash. Time to pick up some for your home décor.

With home preserve time well underway, tomatoes, onions and peppers are still in high demand. Other vegetables lend themselves well for cool storage such as potatoes, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, cabbage, broccoli, carrots, onions and garlic.

For those that leave the preserving to others, you will find many varieties of jams, jellies, spreads, pickles, and sauces that have been preserved while at their peak.

October is the month when many farmers markets will end. While some markets will move indoors for the cooler weather ahead, many of us will bid farewell to the vendors that we have come to know and trust at the outdoor markets. Next spring is already in some thoughts, with plans of returning to our farmers markets again next year. See you in the spring! 🌿

- Michelle Seaborn is the Grimsby Farmers Market manager



Grimsby Farmers' Market Facebook photo

Delicious Recipes

Find a good pear-ing this fall

As the growing season winds down we see the arrival of some of the year's late crops, such as squash and root vegetables.

On the fruit side, apples come into season, as do their oddly shaped fellow tree fruit, the pear. With their own unique taste, pears can be a wonderful alternative for those who have had enough apples for a while.

And while they can be tasty eaten on their own, pears can also add a lovely sweetness to many dishes.

Here are a few options to consider as fall arrives.



Pear Chili Chutney

Ingredients

- 4 cups (1 L) diced peeled Ontario pears, about 6 large
- 1-1/2 cups (375 mL) chopped Ontario onion
- 1 or 2 Ontario jalapeño peppers, seeded and chopped
- 1 Ontario sweet red pepper, roasted, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup (250 mL) apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup (250 mL) packed brown sugar
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) chopped fresh gingerroot
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) Ontario honey
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) soy sauce
- 2 tsp (10 mL) turmeric
- 2 tsp (10 mL) dry mustard
- 1 tsp (5 mL) chili powder
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt

Instructions

In large stainless pot, combine pears, onions, jalapeño pepper, roasted red pepper, vinegar, sugar, ginger, honey, soy sauce, turmeric, mustard, chili powder and salt. Bring to boil; reduce heat and boil gently for 15 minutes or until mixture is thickened to a jam-like consistency.

Ladle hot chutney into six 1-cup (250 mL) hot canning jars, leaving 3/4-inch (2 cm) headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace as necessary. Wipe rims and place a hot lid disc on jar. Screw band down until fingertip tight.

Place jars in canner, ensuring they are completely covered with water. Return to boil and process for 15 minutes. Turn off heat and remove canner lid. Let jars stand in water for 5 minutes. Transfer jars to a towel-lined surface and let stand for 24 hours. Check lids and re-ferigate any jars that are not sealed.



Pear and Blue Cheese Salad

Ingredients

- 4 Ontario pears
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) lemon juice
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) milk
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) diced Ontario celery
- 3 tbsp (50 mL) crumbled blue cheese
- Ontario lettuce

Instructions

Halve and core 4 Ontario pears. Brush cut surfaces with 1 tbsp (15 mL) lemon juice. Combine 1/4-cup (50 mL) mayonnaise, 1 tbsp (15 mL) milk, 1/2-cup (125 mL) diced Ontario celery and 3 tbsp (50 mL) crumbled blue cheese. Spoon over pears. Serve each pear half on a bed of Ontario lettuce leaves.



Pear Prosciutto Stuffed Pork Tenderloin

Ingredients

- 3 tbsp (45 mL) olive oil
- 3/4 cup (175 mL) diced Ontario shallots
- 2 cups (500 mL) diced peeled Ontario pears
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) chopped fresh Ontario rosemary leaves (or 1 tsp/5 mL dried)
- 1 tsp (5 mL) fresh Ontario thyme leaves (or 1/2 tsp/2 mL dried)
- 1 large clove Ontario garlic, minced
- 1 cup (250 mL) finely shredded Ontario Asiago cheese
- Salt and pepper
- 2 Ontario pork tenderloins (about 1-1/2 lbs/750 g each)
- 8 thin slices Ontario prosciutto (about 4 oz/125 g)
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) chicken broth
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) Ontario red wine (such as pinot noir)
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) butter

Instructions

In large skillet, heat 2 tbsp (25 mL) of the oil over medium heat. Add shallots and cook for 3 minutes. Stir in pears, rosemary, thyme and garlic. Cook for 2 minutes; transfer to medium bowl. Cool for 10 minutes. Stir in cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

Cut tenderloins almost through lengthwise; open like a book. Cover with plastic wrap and pound to 1/2-inch (1 cm) thickness. Lay 2 prosciutto slices lengthwise on each side of tenderloin, overlapping slightly in the middle. Spoon half of the reserved filling down centre of each. Fold prosciutto over filling to enclose filling. Fold tenderloin over prosciutto to enclose. Tie with strings at 1-1/2-inch (4 cm) intervals.

Place seam side up in large roasting pan. Brush with remaining oil. Bake in 350°F (180°C) oven for 40 minutes, or until meat thermometer inserted in centre reads 160°F (71°C). Remove to platter. Tent with foil; let stand for 10 minutes. Remove and discard string. Slice into 3/4-inch (2 cm) slices.

Transfer pan drippings to medium saucepan. Whisk in flour; cook for 1 minute over medium heat. Whisk in broth and wine; stir for 3 minutes or until thickened. Whisk in butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot, drizzled over sliced tenderloins.



Grilled Pizza with Mushrooms, Pear and Brie

Ingredients

- 2 tsp (10 mL) olive oil
- 4 oz (125 g) Ontario mushrooms, sliced
- Salt and pepper
- 1 firm but ripe Ontario Bartlett pear, thinly sliced
- 4 oz (125 g) Ontario Brie cheese, rind removed and cut into 1/2-inch (1 cm) cubes
- 1 baked pizza crust, preferably thin crust
- 3 tbsp (45 mL) fresh Ontario basil leaves, thinly shredded

Instructions

Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high; add mushrooms and sauté, 4 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

In medium bowl, gently toss together mushrooms, pear slices and Brie.

Place pizza crust top side down on grill over medium-high heat; cook just until grill marks appear, about 1 minute. Flip crust over and scatter pear mixture evenly over crust. Close lid and grill until cheese melts, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove and scatter with basil.



Apple-Pear Buttermilk Cake with Maple Syrup Glaze

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups (375 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tsp (7 mL) baking powder
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) baking soda
- 1 tsp (5 mL) ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2/3 cup (150 mL) granulated sugar
- 2 Ontario eggs
- 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla
- 2/3 cup (150 mL) buttermilk
- 2 small Ontario apples (unpeeled), thinly sliced
- 1 small Ontario pear (unpeeled), thinly sliced
- Glaze:
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) Ontario maple syrup
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) cornstarch

Instructions

Lightly oil or butter 9-1/2 inch (24 cm) spring-form pan. In bowl, stir together flour, baking powder, baking soda, nutmeg, cinnamon and salt until evenly blended.

In mixing bowl and using electric mixer, beat butter on medium speed 30 seconds. Add sug-

ar and beat 2 minutes. Add eggs and beat until light and fluffy. Beat in vanilla.

With mixer on low speed, alternately beat in flour mixture and buttermilk, making 3 additions of dry and 2 of liquid, to make thick batter. Turn into prepared pan and smooth top. Arrange alternating slices of apple and pear in tight concentric pattern on top, gently pushing cut side of fruit into batter. Bake in centre of 350°F (180°C) oven 45 to 50 minutes or until cake tester inserted in centre comes out clean.

Glaze: Meanwhile, in small saucepan, whisk together maple syrup and cornstarch over medium heat until blended; bring to boil, stirring often. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring frequently, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Brush over hot cake; let cool 5 minutes. Remove sides of pan. Brush sides of cake with glaze. Gently pour remaining glaze over top. Cut into wedges and serve warm or cool. Cake will keep refrigerated for several days.



Pear And Cranberry Cobbler

Ingredients

- 5 firm ripe Ontario pears, peeled, cored and sliced
- 1 cup (250 mL) Ontario cranberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) all-purpose flour

- 1 tsp (5 mL) grated orange rind

Topping:

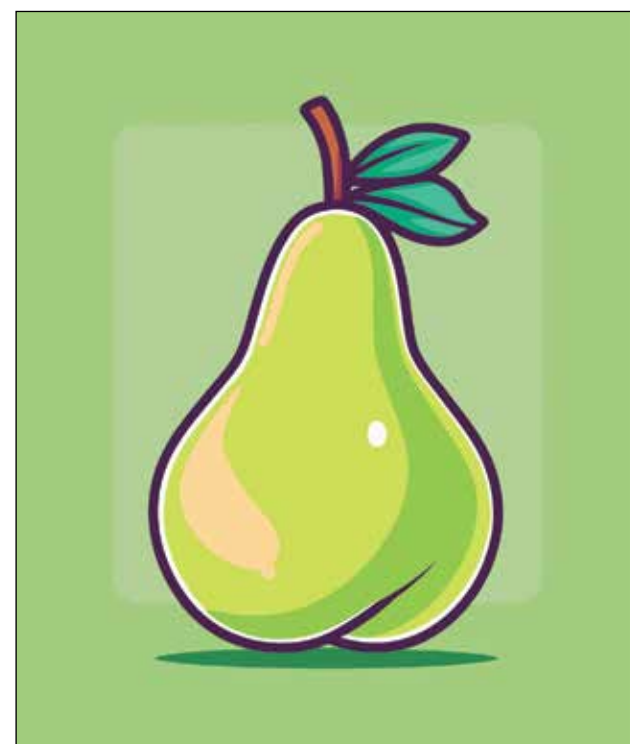
- 1 cup (250 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1-1/2 tsp (7 mL) baking powder
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) baking soda
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) butter, softened
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) granulated sugar
- 1 Ontario egg
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) orange juice

Instructions

In bowl, combine pears, cranberries, sugar, flour and orange rind; place in ungreased 9-inch (23 cm) square baking dish.

Topping:

In small bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt; set aside. In separate bowl, cream butter and sugar; beat in egg and orange juice. Stir in dry ingredients. Drop 9 spoonfuls of batter evenly onto filling (no need to cover all fruit). Bake in 350°F (180°C) oven for 45 to 50 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly. 🍃



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All are welcome to the Wainfleet Fall Fair

By Luke Edwards

This year's Wainfleet Fall Fair was a chance for those new to the area to learn a little about farm life, or for those long time residents to reconnect.

There was a little bit of both as this year's fair returned last month. With three days of fun, visitors streamed through the arena, hung out with animals, or enjoyed the music, food and activities throughout.

It was the first time out to the fair for Emily Hicks, who recently moved to Welland. And it was a great learning experience for her.

"I'm from Toronto so I've never really seen farm life," she said, shortly after petting a couple of farm animals on display.

"I love the small town vibes."

Others, like Raelynn Darnay and her family, have made the fair an annual tradition. Young Raelynn tried her hand at curling with a special setup from the Welland Curling Club, though she also had her eyes on another activity.

"The bouncy castle," she quickly declared, when asked what her favourite part of the fair was.

The fair marked a bit of a bittersweet weekend for Jes Kumar, who has spent the past year as Wainfleet's first official fair ambassador.

"I loved it," she said of the experience.

From promoting Wainfleet, to visiting other fairs and meeting new people, Kumar said it was a busy but incredible time. Even a slight hiccup while she competed in the ambassador competition at the Canadian National Exhibition didn't dampen the experience.

Ambassadors could choose to have their presentations be considered for the ambassador competition, or simply present and not be judged. Kumar was eager to be a part of the competition, but some mixup had organizers thinking otherwise.

Still, she said she thoroughly enjoyed everything about being an ambassador. Meeting other ambassadors showed Kumar both how different and how similar farming communities are in Ontario. She met so many people who had such varied backgrounds, much like herself. Kumar grew up in a rural community in India before her family moved to Canada.

Others she met had other unique stories, though she said they also shared a similar passion for farming.

"I made some life long friends," she said. 🌱



Last month's Wainfleet Fall Fair put a cap on Jes Kumar's time as fair ambassador, a job she said she loved from start to finish. ~ Luke Edwards photo



Raelynn Darnay throws a curling stone on a special setup brought to the Wainfleet Fall Fair by the Welland Curling Club.



The Repeatles, a Beatles tribute band, perform at the fair.



It was a first time visit to the fair for Emily Hicks, who loved the small town vibes after moving to Niagara from Toronto.



Some funky looking birds welcomed visitors to the Wainfleet Fall Fair.



There were all kinds of animals at the fair, including rabbits.



A family watches as a clown makes a balloon animal at the fair.



Gardeners, growers and creators of all kinds were eager to see a ribbon on their entries to the Wainfleet Fall Fair.



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Ag Robotics Demo Day 2026 showcases emerging farm technology in Simcoe

By Amanda Nelson

The 2026 Ag Robotics Demo Day was held July 22 at the Ontario Crops Research Centre in Simcoe, a University of Guelph research station.

The field demonstration event brought together farmers, researchers, agri-businesses, students and government staff from across Southwestern Ontario. It was organized by the AgRobotics Working Group in partnership with the University of Guelph and Innovation Farms Ontario.

Small- and large-scale companies from across Ontario demonstrated new and emerging robots, autonomous tractors, drones, precision-weeding tools and other agri-technology equipment in working crop fields rather than in a trade-show setting.

Norfolk Drone Services, a company that provides aerial spraying, spreading and mapping services for agricultural, landscaping and industrial applications, was among the exhibitors.

Owner Justin Schieck gave attendees a demonstration of the company's spray technology and explained how drones can help farmers save time and reduce operating costs. He said drones can also be used when crop canopies become too high for conventional equipment, or when soil conditions are too wet for field traffic.

"Once a canopy gets high, you can't really spray beans or corn because it's too tall," he said. "In the fall, I really see drones tackling the heavy canopies where you're not getting that 25 per cent loss from driving over your beans."

Finite Robotics owner Matt Stevens presented the company's robotic fruit-thinning technology, which is de-

signed to help fruit growers automate labour-intensive orchard tasks such as fruit counting, crop-load measurement, tree-health monitoring and yield estimation.

"Each arm has a camera with two eyes on it," he said. "It's looking at the tree. It's figuring out exactly how many fruit there are. It's sizing every single fruit. It's doing a cluster analysis, and then it's determining which ones it needs to remove. It does that in about 100 milliseconds, so 10 times a second, and then it reaches out and it cuts off the fruit."

Stevens said orchard growers are facing labour shortages and rising labour costs, and that Finite Robotics is developing robotic and AI-based systems to reduce the amount of manual scouting and monitoring required in orchards.

Another highlight of the event was Ecorobotix, which demonstrated an AI-guided spraying system designed to reduce the use of plant-protection products and fertilizers.

Company representatives said the technology can reduce input use, labour requirements and spray drift. They discussed examples in which growers significantly reduced water use during spraying operations and emphasized the importance of lowering production costs for Ontario farmers.

The event was intended to give producers an opportunity to see emerging agricultural technologies operating in real field conditions and to speak directly with developers and researchers.

Discussions throughout the day also focused on the role technology could play in attracting younger people to agriculture by creating new connections between students, innovation and farming. 🌱



The NAIO Oz Robot works in a demonstration field, showcasing its ability to sow, mark rows, cultivate and weed in market gardens and specialty crops. The demonstration was part of Ag Robotics Demo Day, held July 22 at the Ontario Crops Research Centre in Simcoe, a University of Guelph research station. ~ Amanda Nelson photos



Burro Robotics demonstrates autonomous technology that uses computer vision, high-precision GPS and artificial intelligence to follow people and navigate independently while performing a range of agricultural tasks.



The Ecorobotix ARA demonstrates its AI-powered precision spraying technology, which can reduce the use of plant protection products and fertilizers by up to 95 per cent while saving farmers time and money.



Finite Robotics demonstrates its fruit-thinning technology, designed to automate labour-intensive orchard tasks such as fruit counting, crop-load measurement, tree-health monitoring and yield estimation.

Marshville takes people back in time

By Luke Edwards

Over Labour Day weekend, visitors to Wainfleet were reminded just how much work it once took for something as simple as a pair of gloves.

The annual Marshville Heritage Festival returned to the community during the September long weekend. Featuring costumed volunteers, and plenty of food, fun and music, everything about the event takes people back in time.

“Overall this is a wonderful event,” said Ron Schroder, chair of the Mackenzie Printery and Newspaper Museum in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Staff and volunteers from the museum were on hand at Marshville showing visitors how printing was done in the 19th and 20th centuries. A Whitlock flatbed newspaper press - one a couple such surviving presses in Ontario - was in use much like it was for so many years producing the Thorold News.

Printing in those days required a person with a special skillset.

“A mix of artist and mechanic,” said volunteer Ashley Andrews.

Not too far away from the printers, Dan Bath was engaged in a very different, but also very important, process. He was converting three deer hides into buckskin leather, which would ultimately become gloves with rabbit hides to add some warmth. To do so he had to submerge the hides in an egg solution, and the oils in the egg solution turn the hide into a pliable, flexible leather.

Bath said learning about the process is rewarding and using the hide to make buckskin leather - as opposed to just throwing it away - shows respect to the animal. He said people were fascinated to learn the process and how



Brooklyn Bergsma and Christy Aarts were some of the many volunteers dressed up in period costumes at the Marshville Heritage Festival. ~ Luke Edwards photo

the hide interacts with the fats in the egg solution.

“Really, not much changes,” he said. His process is similar to how many others would have tanned deer hides in the past.

Inside, Gwendolyn Goodfellow stood behind a table with all sorts of contraptions laid out. Unfamiliar to many 21st century types, the young volunteer challenged visitors to figure out what each device did. There was a shaving mug, a

dough roller and another device for filing down a horse’s teeth, all important tools once upon a time.

The Marshville Heritage Festival is a long running event put on by a strong team of volunteers. Over the years they’ve relocated several historic buildings onto the site, creating a village that resembles life in the 19th century. The Labour Day festival is the group’s major fundraiser. 🍃



Joy Keefer helps Natasha and Robin Makker with some crafts.



Ashley Andrews shows what the volunteers operating the antique presses were producing.



Demonstrators showed visitors to Marshville how certain aspects of life unfolded during pioneer times.



Dan Bath spent the Marshville Heritage Festival showing visitors how deer hides got turned into buckskin leather.



While they came a little after the pioneer days, the antique car show still took visitors to Marshville back in time.

Thanks for the Meal project coming to life

By Luke Edwards

Of all the tools an artist could employ, the shovel is rarely one of them.

But as crews prepared a patch of land on Niagara Stone Road just west of The Hare Wine Co. for a new art installation, Ron Clavier ditched the brush and pencil in favour of a spade, as the group behind the Thanks for the Meal project celebrated a groundbreaking for its debut work.

"It's an appreciation for what our farmers do for us," said Clavier as he posed for a photo with shovel in hand.

While the shovel was only ceremonial - the real work is being done by local businesses, supporters and Niagara College students who are supporting the effort - it marked a significant milestone for the project that's been in the mind of Clavier for several years.

Once complete, the patch of land will be home to a massive, 16-foot-high piece of art-work based on a work by Shayde Sandy, of Cayuga Nation, with the help of Raymond Skye, of Tuscarora Nation. The Art Gallery of Niagara-on-the-Lake commissioned Sandy to create the work, which features the first farmers of Niagara: three Indigenous women, representing the three sisters of corn, squash and beans.

The project is based on similar artworks in and around the Salinas Valley of California, which was home to American author John Steinbeck and which featured heavily in many of his books. Years ago local artist John Cerney began creating large artworks that were placed in farmer's fields highlighting Steinbeck and other aspects of Americana.

It inspired Clavier to come up with a similar idea to honour farmers in Niagara.

"It's art designed to get you to see things in a way you haven't considered before," Clavier said, adding farmers can often be underappreciated for the work they do to provide food for towns and cities.

"It is a thank-you to the people who planted and harvested, to Indigenous peoples whose



Work has begun on the site where the first Thanks for the Meal art installation will be displayed. In the photo at a groundbreaking event last month is project creator Ron Clavier. ~ Luke Edwards photo

agricultural traditions reach back centuries, to the families and workers who built Niagara agriculture, and to the artists, students, tradespeople and community organizations helping preserve those stories for another generation.

Clavier said the hope is that the project will have multiple benefits, from promoting heritage and honouring farmers to acting as another catalyst to bring visitors to NOTL and provide a small boost to the local economy.

While Clavier, an artist who also created the large mural visible to those passing the Niagara

Orchard and Vineyard Corp building in Virgil, said he would have loved to create the Thanks for the Meal pieces himself, he thought it important to incorporate members of the community each artwork represents.

That's why they found Indigenous artists for the first piece, and why he's searching for the right artist to create future works recognizing NOTL's grape and wine history or the British Loyalists who settled here in the late 18th century.

"Importantly, Indigenous culture is not simply being interpreted by outsiders. Skye and Sandy are participating as artists and cultural consultants, helping ensure that Haudenosaunee stories are presented with accuracy, care and respect," said Clavier.

"Too often communities celebrate Indigenous history by speaking about Indigenous people. This project gives Indigenous artists a meaningful role in telling their own story."

Clavier initially hoped to have the debut artwork put up this spring, but weather and timing delayed things. But with ground being broken in September, he remained hopeful it would be fully unveiled this fall.

And with the first installation going up, Clavier and his group are now looking to additional works, and fundraising to help pay for the cost.

For more information or to support the project, contact Clavier at 416-706-0900, ronclavier.com or eye.to.eye@ronclavier.com. 🌱



Local businesses, supporters and members of Niagara College have come together to turn the Thanks for the Meal project from dream to reality.

Cheers to 30 years, CCOVI crosses milestone

By Luke Edwards

Just as Niagara's grape growers were getting ready for a busy harvest season, they offered a toast to an academic institution crucial in making those harvests better and better each year.

The Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, more affectionately known as CCOVI, celebrated its 30th anniversary with an event at Brock University last month. Brock, the Grape Growers of Ontario and the then Wine Council of Ontario (now Ontario Craft Wineries and Wine Growers Ontario) established CCOVI in 1996 to bring academic expertise to grape growing and wine making in Niagara and across the country.

"It started with a simple idea: we put a lab at Brock," recalled Donald Ziraldo, legendary Niagara wine maker and one of the driving forces behind the creation of CCOVI.

That so-called simple idea quickly grew. Today CCOVI boasts a talented team of researchers, providing the grape and wine industry with three main services: research, professional and continuing studies, and knowledge transfer.

And the growth is continuing, as Brock continues work on its Norris W. Walker Research Farm that will be home to the school's Clean

Plant Program, an important service for Canada's grape growers.

CCOVI has also been a key player in other research projects, such as the Vine Alert program that helps growers ensure their vineyards have a better shot of surviving the coldest spells of winter.

The institute also offers workshops, a lecture series, analytical services and more to those in the industry.

"There are so many milestones that we have accomplished," said Debbie Inglis, CCOVI director.

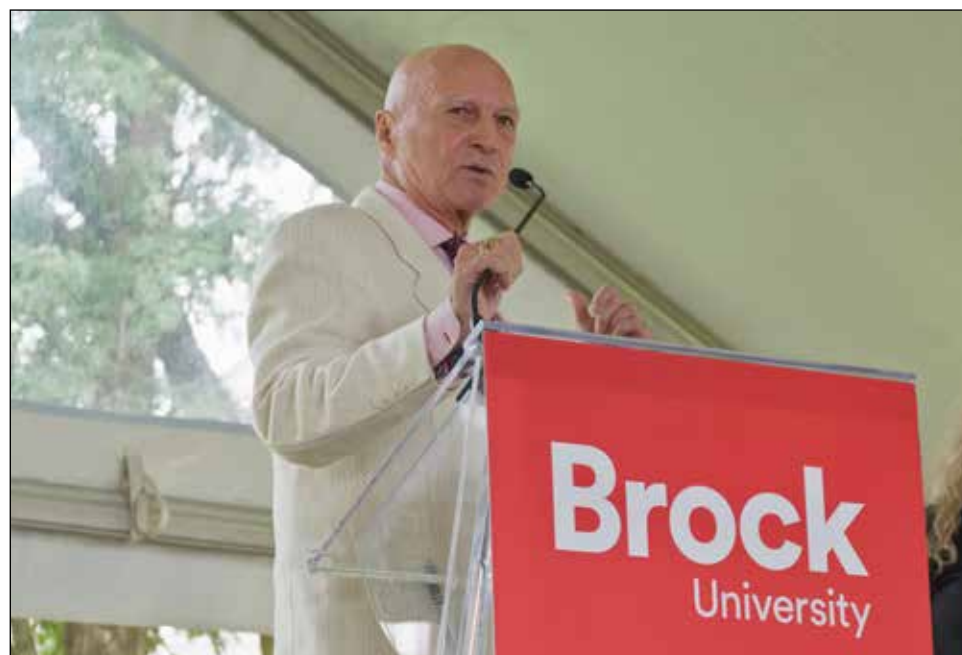
"We were able to accomplish it because we had those partnerships."

Another key part of CCOVI is the Applied Grape and Wine Services program, the only one of its kind in Canada, as well as continuing education opportunities for grape and wine professionals.

Shiraz Mottiar remembers in his university days knowing one thing: he wanted to get into the grape and wine industry. Mottiar, now the general manager and winegrowing director at Malivoire, was one of the first graduates from the CCOVI program.

But he nearly wasn't.

Mottiar's grades weren't quite enough to get accepted initially. But his persistence got him a spot and he graduated in 2000.



Donald Ziraldo, who was one of the leading voices that got CCOVI going 30 years ago, shares some of his thoughts on the institute during an anniversary event held at Brock last month. ~ Luke Edwards photo

"The time I spent at CCOVI was life changing and incredibly memorable to me," he said.

The anniversary event also acted as a chance to celebrate another milestone of sorts, as Barb Tatarnic, manager of professional studies and outreach, retired.

"At the core of CCOVI is relationships, and that's what Barb was all about," said Inglis.

St. Catharines Mayor Mat Siscoe thanked everyone who has made CCOVI a success, saying the grape and wine industry is a vital part of Niagara.

"It's part of our identity and an important part of our region's economy and culture," he said.

With 30 years in the books, the institute now looks forward. The research farm offers exciting prospects for the industry, and while Ziraldo made a pitch for government support in the form of a national VQA and reduction of trade barriers, he also said future success depends on people and the future grape growers and wine makers.

"It's important to move forward, step up, and be the next generation," he said. 🍇



From left, Debbie Inglis, Donald Ziraldo and Barb Tatarnic take part in a toast honouring CCOVI's 30th anniversary.



Shiraz Mottiar and Augusta Van Muyen compete in the finals of a grape stomp during the CCOVI anniversary event.



Members and supporters of CCOVI bid Barb Tatarnic a fond farewell during the 30th anniversary event. Tatarnic is retiring after a career at Brock that spanned four decades. She was a part of CCOVI from the start.



Augusta Van Muyen (left) celebrates with Barb Tatarnic after she won the special CCOVI 30th anniversary grape stomp.



Visitors commemorated the 30th anniversary of CCOVI by putting their autograph to a welcome sign.

‘A beautifully working machine of restoration’: ALUS Norfolk celebrates Trillium grant

By Luke Edwards

Normally during a formal presentation, a cacophony of sound drowning out the speakers would be considered an unwelcome distraction. But at an event held in Haldimand last month it was celebrated as a sign of progress.

As community members continue the work to create their own Haldimand ALUS program, local conservationists, politicians, farmers and ALUS Norfolk representatives celebrated some of the work that’s already been done in the county. That work - creating prairie grasslands on otherwise marginal farmland - has led to a significant reintroduction of several bird species in Haldimand. And those birds were out in full force during the event.

“The birdsong that is surrounding us is absolutely amazing,” said Melissa Collver, member of the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant review team as she stood by a field that formerly grew soybeans but now has tallgrass prairie growing in it. It’s also a hub for the Haldimand Bird Observatory.

Turning the seven-acre field into prairie grass resulted in a rapid increase in bird counts from observatory members. They banded 88 song sparrows between 2021 and 2022 when the field was soybeans. After converting it to prairie grass they banded 1,445 birds over three years from 2023 to 2025.

Over the same two time periods swamp sparrow banding went from 108 to 1,138.

And then there were the bobolinks. HBO members didn’t see any of the birds in the soybean era or the first year of prairie grass. However, in 2024 they banded 88 bobolinks, and with the help of audio lures banded 186 last year. This year they were nearing 400 total with a couple weeks to go.

HBO’s Rick Ludkin told attendees that areas with prairie grass are vital for many bird species.

“When birds are migrating, they have to be able to have fuel and a field like this makes a huge difference,” he said.

“The reason this (increasing bird numbers) is happening is because prairie grass provides seeds.”

The dream to turn the field into a safe haven for birds came from property owners Dave and Elaine Gosnell, as well as Elaine’s parents Liz and Bill Hurkmans before them. There were issues with its use as a soybean field, Elaine said.



Following the work of her parents, Elaine Gosnell and husband Dave turned a former soybean field into a proof-of-concept trial for the ALUS program, where they planted tallgrass prairie. The field now acts as a rest stop for migrating birds, who can fuel up on the grass seeds. In the photo are the Gosnells with Elaine’s parents Liz and Bill Hurkmans. ~ Luke Edwards photo

“When it rained and in the spring, we would have erosion and runoff from the field,” she said. Their property backs onto the Grand River.

But with the prairie grass, Elaine said the improved root structure keeps things in place and soaks up the water. They also have the benefit of cutting and baling the hay, which they sell to a neighbouring beef farmer.

It’s also a test case for ALUS Haldimand, a proposed local group of the national organization that provides farmers payments for turning marginal farmland into restored natural zones.

“There’s a great need for it here in Haldimand. Every time it rains the water turns brown,” said Cathy Blott, a member of the Haldimand Stewardship Council who is one of the people leading the push to create an ALUS Haldimand group. They’ve developed a local steering committee and are in the process of finding a legal entity through which the group can function.

As they develop the Haldimand group, their neighbours in Norfolk have been lending support. It was through ALUS Norfolk - the oldest

continually running ALUS program in Canada - that the Gosnell project took place, and it came with the help of a \$257,000, three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The grant runs through to the spring of 2028.

“It’s a beautifully working machine of restoration,” Blott said.

Program director Stephanie Giles said Haldimand has a unique need for the kind of projects the Gosnells undertook.

“With extra funding, and seeing the drive of the folks in Haldimand, we decided to move forward,” she said, adding there are programs that support tree planting in the county, but not as much for grassland restoration.

However, with 17 acres restored and 15 more in the queue, Giles said they’re well on their way to achieving the goal of converting 30 acres of marginal farmland into wildlife-friendly grasslands.

For more information on ALUS, visit alus.ca.



A member of the Haldimand Bird Observatory shows a visitor how they band birds to help track them.



It only took a year after planting the tallgrass prairie to see the return of several bird species.

Renate McGillivray, president of the West Niagara Agricultural Society, presents the Tricia Vaughan Memorial Scholarship to Emily McGee, who is attending Guelph University this fall. ~ Ann Marie Chechalk photo

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Showcasing innovation that will lead to more Canadian grown food

By Luke Edwards

From advanced AI and fancy robotics to friendly bugs and fungi, visitors to last month's What's Growin' On open house learned how researchers are working to make sure more of the food Canadians eat is food produced in Canada.

The annual event hosted by the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre this year focused on greenhouse production and how it can continue to fill gaps in Canada's food system. Rotating through four presentations, visitors learned about high-wire growing, how advanced robotics could help commercial greenhouse operators, integrated pest management programs and a Vineland project that seeks to reduce waste by finding ways to reuse stonewool substrate.

"This is our chance to showcase Vineland," said Ian Potter, president and CEO of VRIC.

"We're here to support Canada's innovation system, and especially horticulture."

With renewed interest in buying local in the midst of the trade war U.S. President Donald Trump has launched against Canada, the timing couldn't have been better. For some of the visitors, at least, food sovereignty was on their minds as they toured the Vineland campus.

"The scope is absolutely amazing," said St. Catharines resident Judith Turner, who said Canada has for too long relied on cheap produce coming over from the U.S.

"We should be growing our own food," she said.

Commercial greenhouse production is big business in Ontario, though a lot of it is related to ornamental flower production. However, more and more fruits and vegetables are being grown indoors. According to Stats Canada, greenhouse fruit and vegetable production surpassed 866,000 tonnes in 2024, up from 687,000 in 2020. Ontario leads the way with nearly three quarters of that production.

Traditionally, three crops are most associated with greenhouses: cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes. At What's Growin' On, visitors learned how operators use high wires to train the cucumber and tomato vines to ensure strong yields and a steady supply of vegetables.

"It's a very efficient way of growing things," said research scientist Sarah Papp.

The high-wire system allows for better light distribution and more dense planting. But before the vines can be attached to the wire system, the seeds need to germinate, and in greenhouses it's a little different than what one might do in a field or garden.

Using unique substrates, in this case the popular option of stone wool, Papp described how a small block helps the seed germinate while ensuring the grower minimizes water and fertilizer use. A dripper inserted into the stone wool block provides the seed and young plant with exactly what it needs.

"Growers can make fertilizer recipes tailored to each species they're growing," she said.

With those tailored recipes, the plants quickly grow and the small blocks are then placed on larger lengths of stonewool to help the roots expand.

Soon the vines are large enough to attach to the high-wire system, training them to reach upwards instead of spreading out horizontally.



Dan Bath explains to visitors at the What's Growin' On open house how innovations in robotics and AI are helping commercial greenhouse operators. ~ Luke Edwards photos

As they begin producing fruit, the high-wire system can be adjusted so the fruit is always at prime picking level.

And that's where some of the work research scientist Dan Bath shared comes in. For several years Vineland has been working on technology to help growers both manage their plants and harvest them. He showed off a device created with the help of Vineland experts that can harvest cucumbers without the risk of making the costly mistake of accidentally snipping a vine.

For computers, a green cucumber on a background of green vines and leaves makes it easy for it to be confused. But the visioning technology combined with a closed loop cutting device that detects a potential fruit and then inches its way up until - using a pinching method to measure the diameter - reaches the end of the vine, allows the computer to harvest cucumbers safely.

"Just by the diameter of the pinch, we know when we've reached the end of the cucumber," he said.

The technology isn't designed to mimic human harvesting or even replicate its speed, Bath said. However, it's about creating technology that can offer alternatives and offer a return on investment that companies can then make commercially viable.

Technology is also being used to monitor the health and progress of the greenhouse plants. Visioning systems can take scans of the plants and by inputting as much data as possible, growers can create a "digital twin" of a greenhouse system to use computer models to predict outcomes and test how certain decisions could affect the plant.

It's not always computers and robots that growers rely on, however. Rose Buitenhuis, director of biological crop protection, showed visitors how beneficial bugs can play a key role in the fight against disease and infestation.

"Biologicals take advantage of natural enemies the pests have," she said.

In the last several decades greenhouse operators have increasingly moved to these biological options as Canada began regulating pesticide use more stringently and as some pests developed resistance to pesticides.

By developing an ecosystem of beneficial biologicals - Buitenhuis said it requires a team of agents working together to kill the pests at every stage of their lives - greenhouse growers can essentially use Mother Nature to control any outbreaks.

The work of Vineland researchers doesn't just end at harvest, as research scientist Jason Henry shared. Multiple projects have looked at ways to dispose of the waste created by greenhouses in the form of leftover plant material, clips, and substrates. Currently, much of that goes to Ontario landfills, which causes environmental concerns. And with increasing tipping fees, there's an economic impact as well.

Henry and his team have specifically been studying options for reuse of substrate, specifically stonewool. With the help of a grant from the Greenbelt Foundation, they're looking to see how viable it would be to use old stonewool substrate as a soil amendment. Mixing it in with the soil could help with water retention and prevent crop loss during droughts.

Vineland has been studying the issue for several years, and this year took it out into the TreeCulture Research Park, which has several self-contained plots where researchers can test projects in a more real-world setting but still make key measurements and tests.

Further expansion of greenhouse fruit and vegetable production can come in the form of berries, Papp said, something she's been focused on with a recent project. Strawberries have become a more popular greenhouse crop, giving consumers Canadian grown strawberries year round, and other berry crops are being explored as possible options.

For Abigail Stevenson, from Caistor, it was her first visit to the What's Growin' On event and she came away impressed with how much work and research goes into every step of the process.

"It was very informative, I appreciate how interconnected it all is," she said.

As for Potter, the event is a way to show off not just the innovation Vineland supports, but the people who make it happen.

Continued to page A29 →

→ Continued from page A28

"We have expertise that is amazing," he said, adding the team is world renowned for their skill and knowledge.

And that skill and knowledge will continually be put to the test as Canada faces an uncertain future.

"This supports a more resilient food sector," he said. "These tools will help us be more efficient and more sustainable."

Ultimately, he said it's about giving consumers what they want, when they want it, and how they want it. 🌱



Vineland Research and Innovation Centre staff did a brief experiment to show visitors how the reuse of old stone wool could help improve soil quality.



Judith Turner takes a peek through a microscope during a stop at the What's Growin' On open house, where Vineland Research and Innovation Staff discussed integrated pest management.

Local projects help municipal leaders get to know agriculture

By Drew Spoelstra

Municipal governments make decisions every day that affect Ontario farms, from roads, bridges and farmland drainage to land use planning, development and local services.

That's why farmers need to know what is happening at their local governments, but we also need to build relationships with the people making those decisions and help them understand agriculture.

Agriculture is a major contributor to Ontario's economy, generating almost \$53 billion for Ontario's economy and supporting more than 854,000 jobs annually, but farmers make up a relatively small share of our population.

But running for office isn't the only way farmers can make sure agriculture is understood at the municipal level.

We also need to create opportunities for councillors, municipal staff and candidates to meet farmers, visit farms and learn about the realities of running a farm business.

Three local federations have taken on projects this year to do just that, including two I represent on the board of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture as a director, Niagara and Hamilton-Wentworth.

Through the OFA's Revive Fund, our 51 local federations can access matching funding for projects that support agriculture and their communities. Since the program began in 2021, OFA, local federations and project partners have invested a combined total of approximately \$1.5 million in community projects.

The Niagara Federation of Agriculture invited councillors and municipal planning and economic development staff onto a bus tour for a first-hand look at agriculture in the region, visiting four agricultural businesses representing dairy, swine, beef, grain production and custom

farming, as well as beekeeping and pollination services. Along the way, participants also learned about agricultural landmarks and the region's farming history.

One of the interesting takeaways from the day was that while many participants knew Niagara for its tender fruit industry, they didn't realize how diverse agriculture in the region actually is.

They were also surprised by the size of modern farm equipment and gained a better understanding of why road safety matters when farm machinery and other vehicles share rural roads.

The Middlesex Federation of Agriculture took a different approach, hosting a politician forum last winter that brought together representatives from eight agricultural organizations with local elected officials, including municipal mayors as well as provincial and federal representatives.

Farm leaders talked about what their sectors contribute to the local economy and discussed issues including access to skilled labour, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, processing capacity, rural infrastructure and trade.

I farm in Binbrook near Hamilton and my local federation in Hamilton-Wentworth will be hosting a social this fall for municipal election candidates. It will give farmers a chance to meet candidates, hear how they plan to work with the agricultural community and talk directly with them about what farm businesses and rural residents need from their municipality.

Other federations have undertaken similar projects in previous years, such as bus tours in Frontenac and Algoma in 2025, and in Lambton in 2023, or a farmers' breakfast in Arnprior in 2024.

Each project is unique, but they all accomplish something important: bringing agriculture and municipal decision-makers together.

Even in rural Ontario, we can't assume everyone understands agriculture. Councillors



Ontario Federation of Agriculture President Drew Spoelstra ~ OFA photo

and municipal staff come from many different backgrounds, and some may have little direct experience with farming.

That's why these local connections matter. A farm tour, breakfast meeting or conversation with election candidates gives people a chance to ask questions, see how farms operate and better understand why issues like roads, drainage, land use and development matter to farm businesses.

And those relationships are much easier to build before there's a contentious planning application, road project or by-law on the council agenda.

The more our local decision-makers know about agriculture, the better equipped they are to consider its needs when making decisions for their communities. Farmers have an important role to play in helping them get there. 🌱

Drew Spoelstra is the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture

AG EVENTS ON THE HORIZON

Celebrate the harvest and give thanks!

Though cooler, last month brought with it some much welcomed sun, as the storms of August gave way to a calmer September. It was surely a welcome change for grape growers, who were unsure what to expect after the wild summer weather. Now that October is here, attention turns to Thanksgiving, Halloween and then not too far away is Christmas. Here are some ag-related things to do as fall arrives in earnest.

OCTOBER 7 & 8

CANADIAN GREENHOUSE CONFERENCE

Returning to the Niagara Falls Convention Centre this month, those in the greenhouse industry are invited to take in the annual Canadian Greenhouse Conference. Taking place over two days, **Wednesday, Oct. 7 and Thursday, Oct. 8**, it features a full slate of presentations on various topics of interest, including IPM, propagation, economics and more. There's also a bustling tradeshow. For more information on the schedule and registration, visit canadiangreenhouseconference.com.

OCTOBER 9 TO 12

BALL'S FALLS THANKSGIVING FESTIVAL

A longstanding harvest season tradition returns to Ball's Falls this month. The Thanksgiving Festival organized by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority runs **Friday, Oct. 9 to Monday, Oct. 12** at the Jordan conservation site. It includes vendors, food, music, heritage demonstrations and more. For more information visit thanksgivingfestival.ca

OCTOBER 10

HIGHLAND THANKSGIVING FESTIVAL

Stoney Creek's Highland Packers will also be celebrating the harvest with a **Saturday, Oct. 10** festival at their Stoney Creek location. Running from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., visitors are invited out for a day of family-friendly and free activities, including a bouncy castle, face painting and more. Highland Packers is located at 432 Highland Rd. East in Stoney Creek.

OCTOBER 12 & OCTOBER 20

FORT ERIE RACE TRACK SEASON WRAPS UP

The final month of racing at the Fort Erie Race Track includes two special events. On **Monday, Oct. 12**, the kids can get an early start on trick-or-treating with the return of the Track-O-Lantern event, where families are invited to a day of racing while kids can dress up and go trick-or-treating at the track. Racing at the track wraps up for the 2026 season on **Tuesday, Oct. 20**, with fan appreciation day. First post for each race day in October is 12:15 p.m. For more information visit forterieracing.com.

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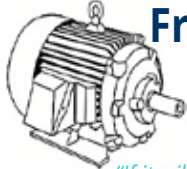


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2020 Ford Edge
6 cyl, 2.7 L, auto, Check Website for
Options, 49,059km
CERT.#460834 **\$27,995**
*185.42/biweekly

Over 50 Trucks on our lot!

Financing
available through:

FirstOntario
CREDIT UNION

HIGHWAY #3, CAYUGA
1-844-608-5845

**WE ARE OPEN Monday - Thursday 9am - 7pm,
Friday - Saturday 9am - 5pm**

Pay less
for your loan &
accelerate your
payments with our
**Accelerated
Bi-Weekly
payments!**

How to calculate your monthly car payment.

(Note: example based on 6.99% interest. All financing is on approved credit. Licensing fee extra.)

Example Vehicle Price:

\$10,000

(All vehicle prices shown include a
full Safety, E-test & Certification -
unless noted otherwise)

Amount to be financed:

\$10,000

5 YEAR TERM:

(Total cost of borrowing: \$1877.60)..... **\$197.96**

6 YEAR TERM:

(Total cost of borrowing: \$2271.68)..... **\$170.44**

7 YEAR TERM:

(Total cost of borrowing: \$2673.92)..... **\$150.88**

*All loans are open and can be paid of at any time during term.
Posted interest rate based on time of printing & subject to change.

WWW.HALDIMANDMOTORS.CA



Healthy Planet®

WELCOME *fall*

Visit us at:

7481 Oakwood Drive, Niagara Falls

Scan Here For More Flyer Deals:



FAIRTRADE MONTH

Shop items with to support Fairtrade brands that help farmers practice sustainable farming & earn fair wages.

Organic Produce

Produce Sale Period: October 1st - 14th

Organic Butternut Squash



Organic Grape Tomato 1pt



Organic Green/Rainbow/Red Chard



Organic Ambrosia Apples 3lbs



OFFER VALID TILL OCTOBER 14

Natural & Organic Foods

Giddy Yo
Entire Line



Simply Organic
Entire Line



Camino
Entire Line



Nuts To You
Sunflower and Pumpkin Seed
Butters All Kinds



Natural Beauty

Routine
Entire Line



Widcraft
Entire Line



Health Supplements

AquaOmega
Omega-3 3:1 240SG



Organika
Electrolytes+Enh Collagen
360g All Kinds



Genuine Health
Clean Collagen Marine Powder
400g



Carlson
Entire Line



Sports Nutrition

Biosteel
Sports Mix All Sizes



Good Protein
All-in-One Shake
440g & 880g



Disclaimer: Healthy Planet reserves the right to correct printing errors. Some products listed in this flyer may not be available in all stores. Pricing, promotion and availability may vary. We reserve the right to limit quantity. No rain checks. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Check in-store for senior's day discount details. | The maple leaf labels signify products from Canadian-owned businesses or those made in (or a product of) Canada. This information is based on details provided by the brands and/or their distributors. For the most accurate information, please refer to the product packaging. While we strive for accuracy, Healthy Planet cannot guarantee all claims and reserves the right to correct any errors. The Coupon Offer is valid only at the Niagara Falls Store.