



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Six industry leaders to be inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame

Guelph, February 5, 2024 - In 2024, the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame (OAHF) will induct six leaders who have positively influenced Ontario agriculture and beyond.

Their influences range from agricultural education and lobbying for farm tax reform to farm organization leadership, the science of egg farming, berry, cider and greenhouse innovation and poultry welfare.

The successful nominees for induction include:

- Bert Andrews
- Ron Bonnett
- Bill Gray
- Grant Howes
- Verner Toews
- Tina Widowski

All have all been selected by the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame Association as worthy candidates based on their life-long commitments to Ontario's agriculture.

The inductees will be recognized in a ceremony on June 9, bringing the total number of inductees recognized since 1980 to 262. To qualify for this prestigious recognition, inductees must have shown visionary leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship and have demonstrated a lasting legacy to Ontario agriculture through their careers.

Inductees for 2024 and their nominators include:

Bert Andrews (1943 -)

Bert Andrews has devoted his life to agriculture, education and community. As a board member of Fruit Wines of Ontario, he was successful in advocating for the sale of Ontario fruit wines at provincial farmers' markets. He also led research and worked with the Halton Federation of Agriculture, Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee and MPAC to ensure farm values were based on farmer-to-farmer sales (and not at development-based values). This successful campaign raised significant awareness to farm values and brought fairness to the assessment process.

As the owner/operator of Andrews Scenic Acres, he was a leader in agriculture and food education. Annually, the business hosted more than 15,000 students and approximately 60,000 visitors. It also provided the University of Guelph with space for test plots for blueberries, strawberries and raspberries to advance varieties and pest control. His commitment to the farming community also resulted in him serving in leadership roles with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Ontario Berry Growers, Farmers Markets Ontario and Country Heritage Park, among others.

Bert Andrews is nominated by the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture

Ron Bonnett (1952 -)

Ron Bonnett has shown a long-standing commitment to the agriculture and agri-food sectors municipally, provincially, federally and globally since he moved to an Algoma farm in 1975. As founding president of the Algoma Federation of Agriculture, Ron went on to serve in leadership roles with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and most recently as founding president and North American board member for the World Farmers' Organization.

Ron's leadership at both OFA and CFA was integral during the Walkerton water crisis and then the BSE crisis. As president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture during the Walkerton crisis, Ron recognized that it was critical for agriculture in Ontario to take a responsible attitude and work together with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment to find solutions that would make it possible for agriculture to survive and at the same time be responsible to the environment. At the federal level during BSE, Ron, as president of OFA, worked closely with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) and government to develop national support programs to help the industry through the financial crisis and also travelled to Brussels, Geneva and Washington to reassure trading partners of the safety of Canadian product and steps taken to manage the disease.

Ron Bonnett is nominated by the Algoma Federation of Agriculture

Bill Gray

"Keep growing, keep building and operate as if you will go on forever." As CEO and owner of L.H. Gray & Son Ltd., Bill Gray has lived this philosophy and has dedicated his life to innovating the future of food in Ontario and across Canada through constant adoption of new egg-farming science and technologies. He has a passion for quality partnerships and works with hundreds of Ontario egg farmers to grade and market their eggs. His interest in the egg industry also expands beyond borders. He continuously learns from other industry leaders through the US and globally, bringing this international perspective home to improve Ontario's egg industry.

Gray Ridge's egg farms have also been among the first in Canada to implement welfare-friendly advances in cage free and enriched colony hen housing systems and barn designs and contain some of the country's most technologically advanced housing and ventilation systems. He has also continuously supported advancements in poultry education and research at his farms and never misses an opportunity to share knowledge with others.

Bill Gray is nominated by Gray Ridge Eggs Inc.

Grant Howes (1956 – 2017)

Grant Howes was a visionary leader in apple growing and specifically cider production, pioneering innovative practices and technologies in developing cider orchards that enhanced productivity and sustainability within the industry. Grant was a vocal advocate for Ontario apple growing at the local and provincial levels. As the craft cider sector grew in Ontario, Grant was a mentor to many always willing to share ideas and work with new cideries. His initiatives also helped Ontario cider apple farmers adopt more environmentally friendly farming techniques. His commitment to collaboration was also a driver for the establishment of the Ontario Craft Cider Association of which he was a founding member. Grant was also a founding member of Fruit Wines of Ontario, and Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association.

Grant Howes is nominated by Jenifer Dean, The County Cider Company

Verner Toews (1937 – 2023)

Verner Toews was a lifelong vegetable farmer who was involved in the initial efforts of crafting and participating in pricing negotiations with processors. Additionally, he was one of the first greenhouse growers in Ontario, paving the way for a sector which has grown and developed greatly over the past 60 years.

As chair of the Essex County Associated Growers, Vern travelled the province promoting the benefits of greenhouse-grown produce. The result of his efforts was the establishment of what is now called Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers. His tenure also included multi-term positions as director on the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association and with Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers.

Throughout the industry, Verner is recognized for his contributions made to negotiating fair prices with processors, developing Ontario's greenhouse marketing board to protect pricing for producers, his work in advocating and developing federal initiatives such as the Temporary Foreign Worker program and tax incentives for donated foods.

Verner Toews is nominated by the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers' Association

Dr. Tina Widowski (1958 -)

Dr. Tina Widowski is one of the world's foremost experts in the housing and management of farm animals and has been described as a pioneer in poultry behaviour and welfare research in Canada and globally. As a professor in the Department of Animal Biosciences at the University of Guelph, with training in animal behaviour and physiology, she has studied such diverse topics as the endocrinology of nest building in sows, the behavioural responses of hens to different lighting systems, the development of feeding and drinking in piglets and motivation for dust bathing and nesting in laying hens. Her research has also tackled the transport and handling of market pigs, and methods for euthanasia for piglets and poultry.

Tina has also played a significant role working with National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) and producer groups in the development of several new Codes of Practice. Over the years, Tina's research has improved animal welfare in Ontario and Canada, being cited in numerous NFACC Scientific Committee Reviews, including those for pigs, laying hens and meat birds. She has mentored hundreds of students and inspired many more.

Dr. Tina Widowski is nominated by the Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare

The 2024 induction ceremony will take place on Sunday, June 9, 2024, at the Grand Way Event Centre, Elora. Registration is available at a cost of \$40 (for in person attendance) or \$20 (virtual attendance) on the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame Association's website at www.oahf.on.ca.

It is the mission of the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame Association to acknowledge, record, and preserve the contributions made by leaders to the growth and development of Ontario's agriculture and agri-food industry. To date, 256 worthy candidates have been inducted into the Hall of Fame gallery.
www.oahf.on.ca

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