



**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

(Guelph) – February 2, 2026 – The Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame (OAHF) is proud to announce the induction of five exceptional leaders whose careers have left an indelible mark on Ontario's agricultural landscape and beyond.

Representing a diverse cross-section of the industry - including a Canadian Senator, pioneering researchers, and influential farm leaders - the 2026 inductees have driven progress in areas such as national policy, viticultural innovation, genetic advancement, and industry governance.

The 2026 Inductees are:

- **The Honourable Robert Black**
- **Dr. Helen Fisher** (Posthumous)
- **Scott Graham**
- **Percy Hodgetts** (Posthumous)
- **Brian O'Connor**

Selected by the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame Association, these individuals are being honoured for their lifelong dedication and transformative contributions to the province's agri-food sector.

The formal induction ceremony will take place on **June 14 at the GrandWay Event Centre in Elora**. This year's cohort will bring the total number of distinguished inductees to 272 since the Hall's inception in 1980.

Inductees for 2026 and their nominators include:

The Honourable Robert Black (1962 -)

Nominated by John Taylor on behalf of the Taylor family

Senator Robert Black is a distinguished leader who has dedicated over 40 years to advancing Ontario and Canada's agricultural sectors. Appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2018, he has become a pivotal national advocate, serving as Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Leader of the Canadian Senators Group. His notable legislative successes include spearheading the act to officially establish Food Day in Canada,

which celebrates domestic food production. He also led a critical, first-in-40-years study on soil health, "Critical Ground: Why Soil is Essential to Canada's Economic, Environmental, Human, and Social Health" which now informs national soil health and conservation policy.

Beyond policy, Black has been a "powerhouse" for youth development, leading 4-H Ontario's transition to an independent charitable organization, as founding Chief Executive Officer of the Rural Ontario Institute (ROI), and Program Director of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) where he mentored over 136 Ontario agricultural and rural leaders.

His lifelong commitment to agriculture and rural has earned him numerous honours, including the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Dr. Helen Fisher (1948 – 2025)

Nominated by Arthur and Marlene Moyer, Ronald Moyer Limited, and Dr. Wendy McFadden Smith

Dr. Helen Fisher, affectionately known as "the Grape Doctor," was a pioneering viticulturist whose visionary leadership and research transformed Ontario's wine industry. During her distinguished career as a researcher first at the Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario, then as an Associate Professor at the University of Guelph, she played an instrumental role in the 1980s transition from labrusca to vinifera grapes. This foundational change elevated the global reputation of Ontario wines. Her achievements in applied research provided growers with practical, science-based solutions for critical challenges, including the use of wind machines to mitigate cold injury, the development of trellising systems to enhance yields, and expertise in rootstock selection.

Beyond her technical contributions, Dr. Fisher was a dedicated educator who mentored generations of viticulturists at the University of Guelph, Niagara College, and Brock University, many of whom now hold leading roles in the industry. She was also a trailblazer in agricultural leadership, breaking gender barriers as the first woman appointed to Ontario's provincial agricultural field advisory service. Her enduring legacy is defined by her profound influence on the modern viticultural landscape and is reflected in numerous accolades, including multiple lifetime achievement awards from organizations such as the Vintners' Quality Alliance (VQA) and the American Society of Enology and Viticulture.

Scott Graham (1952 -)

Nominated by Egg Farmers of Ontario

Scott Graham is a visionary leader and second-generation egg farmer whose career has profoundly impacted Ontario's agricultural sector and the national egg industry. As Chair of the Egg Farmers of Ontario from 2012 to 2020, he led critical initiatives like the Quota Transfer

System (QTS), which established a fair and transparent auction process for buying and selling quota. He also championed the creation of the Consumer Choice Campaign, a pivotal movement that led to the creation of the now nationally recognized Egg Quality Assurance™ (EQA®) program, ensuring high standards for food safety and animal care.

A champion of innovation, Graham was more recently a key driver behind the Hyper-eye project, a non-invasive technology for the gender identification of eggs prior to hatching. His advocacy extended globally through international development projects in Africa, where he joined other farmers in building sustainable poultry operations to combat food insecurity. From defending supply management during trade negotiations to providing leadership for the launch of the Food Bank Egg Donation Program (now supporting more than 130 Ontario food banks), Graham's legacy is defined by his commitment to building trust between farmers and consumers while mentoring the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Percy W. Hodgetts (1878 – 1966)

Nominated by Dr. Christine Baes, University of Guelph and Sandra Lindsay

Percy W. Hodgetts, hailed as the “father of Ontario’s modern fruit industry,” was a transformative leader whose 41-year career with Ontario’s Department of Agriculture reshaped the province’s fruit sector. Serving as the first Director of the Ontario Fruit Branch for 35 years, Hodgetts moved Ontario from a patchwork of household orchards to a commercial industry. He professionalized the sector by appointing the province’s first specialized apiarist and entomologist and by establishing the Horticultural Experimental Station at Vineland as a centre for innovation. He also championed the Fruit Pests Act, introducing inspection and spraying systems that protected orchards from devastating pests.

Beyond research and policy, Hodgetts was a trusted and respected leader for Ontario growers. His 34 years on the Executive Committee of the Ontario Fruit Growers’ Association reflected sustained confidence in his leadership while experimentation at his own Clarkson orchard ensured his work remained grounded in practice. He advanced cooperative marketing, standardized box packing, cold-storage infrastructure and the “Big O” brand. Hodgetts launched demonstration trains, packing schools and field programs to extend knowledge directly to growers. Even during climate crisis of the 1930s, the systems he built provided a resilient foundation that allowed the industry to adapt and endure.

Brian O’Connor (1960 -)

Nominated by Amanda Jeffs on behalf of the EastGen Board of Directors

Brian O'Connor is a transformational leader whose career has profoundly shaped Ontario’s dairy and agricultural sectors. As the founding General Manager of EastGen, he worked with Producer Directors in the critical merger of Eastern Breeders Inc. (EBI) and Gencor, creating a unified, world-class entity in cattle genetics. His leadership in technological innovation

introduced industry-standard tools to Ontario farms, significantly improving producer profitability. During the BSE crisis, O'Connor demonstrated a commitment to infrastructure preservation by establishing Gencor Foods meat plant and spearheading the revival of Thornloe Cheese, actions that safeguarded vital processing capacity and local jobs.

A passionate advocate for the next generation, he founded the Canadian Intercollegiate Judging Competition while he was still in university – a competition which has now run for over 42 years. He also expanded EastGen youth events to reach thousands of future leaders. His policy leadership was equally impactful, as he more recently successfully advocated for farmers during the Ontario Veterinary Act rewrite to ensure changes wouldn't negatively impact farmers. Ultimately, O'Connor's legacy is defined by a more resilient, collaborative, and youth-focused agricultural industry.

The 2026 induction ceremony will take place on Sunday, June 14 at the Grand Way Event Centre, Elora. Registration is available at the cost of \$40.00 (for in person attendance) or \$20.00 (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, 267 worthy candidates have been inducted into the Hall of Fame. www.oahf.on.ca

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