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## Regional Innovations Awarded in Strathroy

June 6, 2011

The following are Regional Award winners of the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence:

### **ELGIN COUNTY**

#### **Rush Creek Wines Ltd. – Aylmer**

Decadence is not just a best-selling wine at Rush Creek Wines; it is a product innovation that has spun into wine jelly, body cream, body sugar scrub and body spritzer. The combination of chocolate and strawberries has created jobs, increased tourism dollars and given business to local honey, fruit and chocolate producers. The winery which is located just south of Aylmer, produces 21 varieties of fruit wine, growing 65 per cent of its fruit supply and sourcing the rest locally. Sales have risen 15 per cent since the owners developed and delivered the first bottle of Decadence which is so much in demand that production has increased to 500 imperial gallons, or about 2,200 litres.

### **LAMBTON COUNTY**

#### **AI McColl Farms – Plympton-Wyoming**

The McColl family not only automated their turkey farm, they made it into a state-of-the-art production facility that they have fitted out for maximum efficiency. A number of improvements over the years have meant increased biosecurity, decreased labour, more eggs laid, reduced energy use and better income. The business has a flock of 3,600 breeding hens and the barns have natural ventilation, automated feeding systems, compact fluorescent lighting and more. Biosecurity is maintained since everything is connected so that no one ever needs to go outside. A new facility, which has gone through all the development stages is being built and will mean even greater achievements: 50 per cent more birds using only 10 per cent more labour than the original operation.

#### **Hog-Tied Farms Ltd. –Thedford**

A US-based ventilation system that John VanEngelen modified to meet his own hog operation's needs is lowering production costs while improving air quality, increasing growth rates, and making barns safer and more environmentally friendly. Twelve fans support 16 rooms at the facility compared to the one to three fans per room in traditional hog barns. His system has also shown that the pigs are ready for market in 15 per cent less time than in more traditional systems. VanEngelen has hosted many farm tours and at least eight other barns in the area have been built using the same technology in the last six years.

## **MacKellar Farms – Alvinston**

When Jacob MacKellar was looking for a value-added product to supplement his 3,000 acre cash crop operation he chose edamame which is a type of soybean harvested in the pod right before it reaches the “hardening” stage. It is a popular food in Asia and increasingly, in North America it is consumed as a snack or as a vegetable dish used in soups or processed into sweets. This non-traditional crop replaces imports and provides excellent returns. Industry representatives project a 500,000 pound market in the next few years, and McKellar will be ahead of the pack with a planned harvest of 100,000 pounds in 2011.

## **Steve Vokes – Petrolia**

You would think farming on flat land would be easy but Steve Vokes, who crops on more than 2,000 acres in Lambton County, knows that every terrain comes with different challenges. Flat land needs several municipal ditches to provide outlets for farm drainage systems. But keeping the drains clean and functioning can be expensive and time-consuming for farmers and municipalities. Vokes created a solution in his own farm shop. His excavator device is based on “wicking” principles and involves directly wet-rolling the surfaces of unwanted vegetation with herbicides. This targeted approach prevents spraying herbicide to other plants. By modifying his excavator, Vokes can easily access both sides of the ditches from one location by “rolling” along the vegetation, since pulling out weeds and woody growth by the roots could destabilize the banks. This one man show pays huge dividends with regard to operator safety and maintaining clear, stable ditch banks.

## **MIDDLESEX COUNTY**

### **Bloemen Dairy Farms Inc. – Lucan**

Otto Bloemen was unable to find a suitable manure tanker and undercarriage to meet his farm’s demands so he decided to design and build his own. What he needed was a big liquid manure tanker with a very large holding capacity to reduce the number of trips to the field during spreading, but he did not want to have a very costly piece of equipment sitting in the shed for the majority of the year. As a result, his invention is large enough to meet his needs, and it’s also adaptable for other applications on the farm. By adding different modules to the undercarriage, it can be used for hauling liquid manure, solid manure and silage. It’s a great example of how ingenuity is spreading on the farm.

### **Junior and Karen Van Geffen – Strathroy**

Feeding 300 cattle twice a day takes a lot of time. Junior Van Geffen decided he needed a hay feeder that would do the job for him so he built one. The feeder is 10-feet high, 12-feet wide and 20-feet long. The ladders are welded to the side and there is a walkway to the top so he can cut the bale strings. The feeder can take any type and size of bale and the wheels on one end make it easy to move. Not only are the well-fed cattle happier and more productive, the new feeder saves the Van Geffens six hours a week, frees up the tractor for other farm work, and reduces waste.

### **Predator Bird Services Inc. & London Dairy Farms Ltd. – London**

Large flocks of starlings pose significant health and safety problems for dairy farms. After working their way through a number of prototypes, Predator Bird Services and London Dairy Farms came up with an extremely effective, inexpensive trap that takes advantage of the birds’ natural behaviour. It’s a humane trap that is safer for employees as well as non-target animal species. Barn owners can use trained hawks and falcons to “herd” the starlings into the trap. The new system has increased catch numbers far beyond any other system on the market.

## **OXFORD COUNTY**

### **Hoenhorst Farms Ltd. – Innerkip**

The owners of Hoenhorst Farms have created the equivalent of a spa for dairy cows. They've integrated leading-edge technologies to make their cows more comfortable and 320 happy cows means more milk. High sidewalls were installed with lots of fans and sprinklers to provide a pleasant interior climate. Cows rest on water mattresses and a quick-fill, fold-out footbath system has been designed to accommodate weekly foot bathing without interrupting the traffic to the six robotic milkers housed in the middle of the dairy barn for easy access by cows and staff. Even robotic manure scrapers help keep the environment clean. Recipes for daily feed mixing are sent to the mixer wagon from the barn's office computer improving accuracy and tracking of daily feed intake. Thousands of visitors have come to see this innovative farm now home to the largest robotically milked herd in Ontario.

### **Salford Farm Machinery – Salford**

The Residue Tillage Specialist built by Salford Farm Machinery does more than just provide a residue management solution for no-till farming operations. It “fluffs” and dries the soil to allow for earlier planting and improves germination by creating uniform seed beds. In zero-till operations, the Residue Tillage Specialist can be used to apply and incorporate fertilizer which reduces nutrient losses through surface erosion of the soil. The popularity of this equipment among no-tillers on three continents has allowed Salford Farm Machinery to expand operations, partner with other manufacturers to increase production and hire more people.

## **ABOUT THE AWARDS PROGRAM**

The Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence program recognizes and rewards outstanding innovations developed by farmers, agri-food businesses and organizations.

There have been 55 winners each year, including a [Premier's Award recipient and a Minister's Award recipient](#).

The Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation program was initially funded for a period of five years starting in 2007. In November 2010, the McGuinty government announced that it will continue to recognize agri-food innovation excellence through a permanent program.