

Agricultural advocates honoured
Food & Farming Champion awards
presented to Sandi Brock and Paul Nairn

April 6, 2021 – (Guelph) Farm & Food Care Ontario presented two Food & Farming Champion Awards at its annual conference on April 6. This year’s recipients include sheep farmer and social media advocate Sandi Brock and Ontario Federation of Agriculture Western Region Member Services Manager Paul Nairn. Both Brock and Nairn are Perth County residents.

The Champion Award has been presented annually, since 1999, in recognition of an individual or group’s significant commitment to public outreach and support for Ontario’s farming community. The decision was made by an independent panel of judges who reviewed all of the 2021 nominations and determined the need for two awards to be presented in 2021.

The award was presented by Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) vice chair Crispin Colvin and past chair Christine Schoonderwoerd in front of a virtual audience of 200 attendees.

Sandi Brock

“No one exemplifies what it is like to be a farmer more than Sandi,” says Brendan Byrne of Grain Farmers of Ontario who submitted the nomination with a support reference from farmer Dave McEachren. “Her transparency of the ups and downs helps to demystify farm life,” he added, referencing Brock’s “*Sheepishly Me*” YouTube and social media channels that give followers an unfiltered glimpse at daily life on her sheep farm in Perth County.

Since 2012, Brock has invited others to follow along her journey as a sheep farmer, sharing personal stories and experiences, through hundreds of social media posts and video blogs. Her videos touch on various aspects of farming, from nutrition to shearing, as well as time spent with her family. The YouTube channel now has more than 240,000 subscribers and her most-recent videos are viewed by tens of thousands of people.

Brock is an accomplished story teller who doesn’t shy away from sharing the challenging aspects of farming, giving viewers a refreshing and authentic behind-the-scenes look at farm life. Byrne praised Brock for her commitment to mental health awareness in agriculture, her openness with her own experiences and as someone that her peers can lean on for support and encouragement.

Brock has also used her social media savvy and openness to grab the attention of the media to highlight the important role of female farmers.

In presenting the award, Schoonderwoerd stated that “grit and authenticity” were key to Brock’s success and applauded Brock for “sharing her every triumph and challenge like an open book.”

Accepting the award from her farm near Staffa, Brock explained that the only way to connect with others is by being authentic and transparent. She added, “To get empathy, you first have to give it, and you have to give it and expect nothing in return – that was the biggest thing I learned doing this.”

Brock also served on FFCO's Board of Directors from 2016 to 2018 and on the Ontario Sheep Farmers' Board of Directors from 2017 to 2020.

Paul Nairn

Paul Nairn was nominated by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), with letters of support from Joanne Fuller, Margaret Vincent and Joanne Hughes, Member Service Representatives with the OFA; Neil and Joan Vincent, past and current directors of the Huron Federation of Agriculture, as well as Perth County pork farmers Tanya and Darryl Terpstra.

Nairn has worked for the OFA for 25 years and is now the Western Region Member Services Manager. "Paul is always supportive and knows the importance of educating the public on modern farm practices and gaining rapport," said colleague Kaylee Coverdale. "He always encourages staff to get involved in their community and become the "faces" of agriculture for local government and the public."

"Paul has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to promote agriculture in Ontario," said Terpstra, "He continues to help lead by example what it is to be a person in leadership and to be proud of our agricultural roots."

Colvin said of Nairn, "All of his nominators made note of his contagious positivity and tendency to shy away from taking the credit he deserves."

In accepting the award, Paul Nairn showed appreciation for his nominators and said, "Supporting the work of Farm & Food Care and promoting agriculture, trying to make a difference to the industry, is what I have been trying to do since I graduated from university."

Nairn is a mentor to other OFA staff and youth in agriculture through his involvement in organizations like Junior Farmers. He often takes on volunteer and leadership roles at local agriculture events, including the International Plowing match, but his nominators were quick to point out that he rarely takes the credit he deserves.

Nairn has been a long-time volunteer with Farm & Food Care, leading teams of volunteers serving food at Breakfast on the Farm events across the province, as well as volunteering to manage FarmFood360° virtual reality booth at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and many other events.

Farm & Food Care Ontario is a coalition of farmers, agriculture and food partners proactively working together to ensure public trust and confidence in food and farming. For more information visit, www.FarmFoodCareON.org.

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