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For Immediate Release

FFCO celebrates agriculture excellence at Harvest Gala

November 18, 2022 – (Guelph) A capacity crowd of farmers and agribusiness leaders from across Ontario came together to enjoy an evening of fellowship and celebration last night at Farm & Food Care’s Ontario Harvest Gala.

As part of the agenda, Feed Ontario presented the recipient of the 2022 Paul Mistele Award to Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO). Named for the late farm leader who founded Ontario Pork’s Donate-A-Hog program in 1998, the Paul Mistele Memorial Award recognizes agricultural partners who have shown a significant and enduring commitment to ending hunger in Ontario. The award was accepted by BFO president Jack Chaffe and Executive Director Richard Horne. BFO was chosen for their steadfast and longstanding commitment to the Feed Ontario Beef Program. Over the years, beef farmers in Ontario have been faced with increased costs, processing capacity backlogs, supply chain and market disruptions, and a great deal of uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet continued to ensure families facing hunger throughout our province had access to nutritious food.

“The Beef Farmers of Ontario provided 52,000 servings of beef to Feed Ontario member food banks across Ontario this year and an incredible 750,000 servings since the program began in 2014,” says Feed Ontario’s executive director, Carolyn Stewart. “As food banks continue to do their best to ensure there is sufficient, nutritious food to meet the growing need in our province, we could not do what we do with the support and generosity of our incredible partners like the Beef Farmers of Ontario.”

“BFO is honoured to be named as the recipient of the Paul Mistele Award this year, and we would like to gratefully acknowledge the partnership we have established over the years with Feed Ontario,” remarks Jack Chaffe, BFO President. “Unfortunately, now more than ever, Ontarians are struggling to absorb the increased cost of goods and services, including food. We continue to be committed to our beef program to supply food banks with ground beef, and finding ways in which we can help address food security to support our communities and those in need across the province.”

In celebration of its 10th anniversary year, Farm & Food Care Ontario invited its top level (Platinum) members to nominate Agri-Food Champions that represented excellence in their industry and in building consumer connections on behalf of food and farming. Those recognized as Agri-Food Champions included:

Ashley Brown of Browndale Farm & Market in Paris, nominated by the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. Brown is being recognized for her work promoting local food through both social media and her family’s on-farm market.

Gary West of Shakespeare was nominated by the Egg Farmers of Ontario. West started a program to end student hunger by providing peeled and packaged hard-cooked eggs to schools- starting with two schools in Perth County and expanding to over 150 schools in total across Waterloo, Huron, Perth and Oxford counties, donating about 1,000 eggs per week.

The Dibble Family of Diburst Farms in Ingersoll was nominated by Beef Farmers of Ontario. Gordon and Melanie Dibble were honoured for their commitment to responsible and sustainable beef production and their efforts towards consumer and public engagement work.

Amanda Dooney of Suncrest Orchards near Simcoe was nominated by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. Dooney was recognized for her willingness to host tours, participate in events highlighting the importance of Seasonal Agricultural Workers to her industry and answer the tough questions about agriculture that come her way.

Donna Rogers of Waterloo Region was nominated by Farm & Food Care Ontario. Rogers is recognized for her lifetime of dedication to the industry, both professionally and her volunteer work for FFCO and the Waterloo Rural Women organization. With FFCO, she serves as a volunteer photographer, capturing thousands of images taken at events across the province.

Joining the sold out crowd was Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, Lisa Thompson and Parliamentary Assistant Trevor Jones, Member of Provincial Parliament for Chatham-Kent-Leamington. In addressing the crowd, Minister Thompson spoke about the important work Farm & Food Care does on behalf of Ontario's entire agri-food industry.

"Whether it's the farm tours for culinary students, the garden-in-a-box program, or sharing stories of international agri-food workers in Ontario, Farm and Food Care Ontario continues to be a champion at raising awareness and increasing public trust in our provincial food system", said Minister Thompson. "Please know I stand shoulder to shoulder with you, and I will keep working each day to grow our sector and demonstrate how Ontario's agri-food sector leads by example worldwide."

"This event was an opportunity for us to come together as the agriculture community in Ontario and celebrate some of the unsung heroes that make this industry exceptional," stated FFCO Chair Bonnie den Haan. "Making agriculture accessible to Ontarians and providing both information and entertainment to those who eat the food we make is a shared goal of the agriculture sector and we are so proud to do that through FFCO."

FFCO Executive Director Kelly Daynard said, "It was such a delight to all be together to celebrate this year. As FFCO's tenth anniversary year comes to a close, it was wonderful to celebrate the contributions made to agriculture and our community at large."

All funds raised at the event will be put into future public trust initiatives. Anyone wishing to make a charitable gift to support FFCO's work can visit www.FarmFoodCareON.org.

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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. Farm & Food Care provides a coordinated approach and credible information on food and farming in Ontario. For more information visit www.FarmFoodCareON.org

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