

Public trust completed record number of events in '23

Farm & Food Care welcomes new board members Joost Van Dresden, Pete Overdeest and Nadine Schwandt

BY LILIAN SCHAEER

Ontario Farmer

Three new directors joined the Farm & Food Care Ontario board at the organization's recent annual meeting.

Joost Van Dresden of Beef Farmers of Ontario was elected as a new livestock director and Pete Overdeest from Dairy Farmers of Ontario is the new livestock sector ex-officio member. They replace previous ex-officio director Jason Leblond from Beef Farmers of Ontario and director Mark Hamel from Dairy Farmers of Ontario. Andrea Veldhuizen from Chicken Farmers of Ontario was re-elected as the third livestock director.

Nadine Schwandt from New Life Mills was elected as a new at large director, replacing Farm & Food Care past chair Bonnie den Haan of Sheldon Creek Dairy. Farm & Food Care chair Crispin Colvin was re-elected to the second at large director position.

"It was so wonderful to have had elections this year. It's what makes this organization strong and means that people are interested in what we do," said Colvin in his remarks to participants. "I serve on a number of different boards, but I think that Farm & Food Care is unique and one of the most fun boards to be a member of. We all have that shared belief in the public trust building work with which we are engaged."

Colvin took over the role of chair from den Haan last year, who first joined the board in 2018 as a representative from Dairy Farmers of Ontario. She served as Farm & Food Care's chair from 2021 to 2023, including through the tough pandemic years that saw the organization have to re-think how it delivered public-facing events.

"I didn't know a lot about Farm & Food Care at first, but I was quickly overwhelmed with the amount of fundraising and work they could do on such a small budget," recalled den Haan, who joined the meeting virtually.

Executive director Kelly Daynard shared some high-



Farm & Food Care executive director Kelly Daynard highlights some of the organization's accomplishments from 2023, which saw a record number of events and programs completed

lights of the organization's past year, which featured a record number of events and programs.

Three Breakfast on the Farm events treated more than 4,000 people to on-farm experiences in Huron County, Napanee and Chatham-Kent in 2023, and returned in a brand new format just a few weeks ago with the one-day Farm Discovery Zone at the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival.

"These events are wonderful in so many ways, but what I'm most proud of and grateful for are the volunteers who sign up for each and every event," said Daynard. "At Farm Discovery Zone, 100 volunteers greeted 15,000 guests and handed out 30,000 food samples so we are off to another great start this year."

The organization organized a record 10 farm tour days in 2023 for key target audiences, including 50 chefs from the Canadian Culinary Federation; food influencers and registered dietitians; culinary students from four Ontario colleges; and approximately 50 staff from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Ottawa. Tour stops featured the Ontario Food Terminal, University of Guelph research stations, a demonstration by a falconer, and 24 different Ontario commodities.

Since 2003, Farm & Food Care has hosted 97 farm tours, bringing guests to more than 225 farms.

Two new tours were added to the FarmFood360 virtual reality tour website thanks to the support of partners Agricultural Adaptation Council, Berry Growers of Ontario and Dairy Farmers of Ontario. The

berry farm tour was filmed at Howe Family Farms in Aylmer and Thames River Melons at Innerkip; and the dairy tour features the Brown family's modern dairy with milking robots near Paris.

Three new tours will be filmed this year and added to the site, which had almost 180,000 page views and generated more than 3.5 million impressions in 2023.

Last year also saw the launch of the sixth edition of the Real Dirt on Farming publication, which has been distributed to MPs, MPPs, Senators and every registered dietitian, Ontario public library and municipal office. This month, more than 200,000 copies of the digest version were distributed nationwide as inserts to the National Post and leading provincial dailies, thanks to a partnership with Bioenterprise Canada.

According to Daynard, the Farm & Food Care team also completed 46 presentations and training sessions, 17 virtual food and farming field trips for more than 18,000 students, and 16 livestock emergency response courses, and joined the public and members at a range of consumer and ag industry events across Ontario.

"We are so appreciative of the relationships we have across sectors and across Can-



Niagara's Henry Swierenga received the 2024 Farm & Food Care Champion Award

ada with partners like 4-H, Agriculture in the Classroom, AgScape and our sister Farm & Food Care organizations in Saskatchewan and PEI," noted Daynard, adding Farm & Food Care has also been successful at receiving funding through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Grassroots Growth Program.

Also at the event, the annual Farm & Food Care Champion Award was presented to Henry Swierenga of Niagara. He was nominated by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture for his continued support of Ontario agriculture, both through his long career with OFA and as a



Last year marked the launch of the sixth edition of The Real Dirt on Farming, distributed nation-wide through Postmedia publications

volunteer at events like Breakfast on the Farm, Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, and Niagara Farm Day.

He's currently also a member of the organizing committee for the 2025 International Plowing Match & Rural Expo, which will be held in Niagara Region.

"This has become a dear organization to me, and it is very important in this age of disinformation and misinformation to get our messages out," he said in accepting the award. "We have to talk face to face because Dr. Google isn't real. That's why I volunteer, it's an opportunity for good, honest conversation."

Bimini has been a Perth County feature since 1947

The camp is getting ready to host another 720 campgoers for the summer season

BY GARY WEST

Ontario Farmer

With warmer weather and longer days, the younger generation not only thinks about the end of the school year, but also about registering for camp.

Camp Bimini located in southern Perth County, on the Embro Road (Perth Rd.113), south of Stratford, is getting ready to welcome 720 campgoers again for the summer of 2024.

Bimini Camp and its coordinator, Carol Young, conducted the church service at Grace United Church in Tavistock recently, and talked about the picturesque 16-acre camp, on



Bimini Camp Coordinator Carol Young, in orange, along with two camp councillors from the past at the camp south of Stratford

the shores of Trout Creek.

The Camp Bimini Coordinator says, "the camp has been in operation since 1947 providing safe, welcoming, and a nurturing place for kids, teens and adults to gather to spend time in nature, meet friends and to grow and learn that they have great value and who they are -

really does matter."

The non-profit church camp serves families of any or no denomination, primarily within a 40-km radius, and typically welcomes campers each summer with a staff team, (volunteer and paid), of approximately 100 part-time and full-time trained personnel.