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For Immediate Release

Celebrating Ontario Food and Farming: FFCO Hosts 17th Annual Harvest Gala

November 28, 2024 – (Guelph) Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) held its 17th annual Harvest Gala on Thursday, November 28, at the Delta Hotel in Guelph. The event welcomed 240 farmers, agribusiness leaders, and supporters of FFCO, all gathering to celebrate Ontario's agriculture and food sector while raising funds to support the charity's outreach initiatives. Highlights included recaps of impactful in-person activations, such as *Breakfast on the Farm* events, and the presentation of the **2024 Paul Mistele Memorial Award** by Feed Ontario to Maple Leaf Foods.

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 Kelly Gubesch from Maple Leaf. Maple Leaf was chosen for its partnership in integrating the Ontario Chicken Program through their new London-based production.

"Maple Leaf Foods has provided an incredible 210,000lbs of freshly processed, tray packed chicken to Feed Ontario member food banks across the province this year, contributing to an astounding 10 million servings since the program began in 2015," said Feed Ontario's CEO, Carolyn Stewart. "Maple Leaf has made a significant impact in ensuring that more food banks across Ontario can receive donations of high-protein chicken. As our network continues to face record-high demand, it is only through the generosity of partners like Maple Leaf that we can ensure food banks can be there for those who need them. Thank you to the Maple Leaf for their partnership and generous support."

"Maple Leaf Foods is honoured to receive the 2024 Paul Mistele Memorial Award from Farm and Food Care Ontario," said Sarah Stern, Director, Community Involvement, Maple Leaf Foods & Executive Director, Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security. Since 2016, the Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security been working to address and reduce food insecurity in Ontario and across Canada. We are committed to supporting communities and advocating for policy changes to make food security a reality for as many Canadians as possible."

Joining FFCO friends and supporters was Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness Rob Flack and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness John Jordan. In addressing the crowd, Minister Flack spoke about Farm & Food Care's commitment to building partnerships while raising awareness about food and farming in Ontario.

"Farm & Food Care Ontario's award-winning efforts in building up awareness about the importance of food and farming in Ontario is so important and greatly appreciated. FFCO's programs and resources including The Real Dirt on Farming, and hosting farm tours and events such as Breakfast on the Farm are strong assets that help connect families with Ontario's thriving \$50.7B agri-food sector.," said Rob Flack, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. "Our government looks forward to strong continued collaboration with FFCO in their outreach, education, and charity efforts and thanks them for their tremendous agri-food contributions."

"This year's Harvest Gala was a remarkable evening that showcased the strength and unity of Ontario's agricultural community," said Crispin Colvin, Chair of the Farm & Food Care Ontario Board of Directors. "From the gourmet all-Ontario menu to the inspiring connections made, the event highlighted our shared successes in fostering public trust in food and farming. It was an honour to celebrate the incredible efforts of our members and partners, including the presentation of the Paul Mistele Feed Ontario Award, which underscores the vital role our sector plays in addressing food insecurity."

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 grow 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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