

*For Immediate Release*

*Agricultural Advocate Tonya Haverkamp named 2026 Food & Farming Champion*

## **Farm & Food Care Ontario Conference Highlights Include New Directors and \$518,000 Federal Funding Announcement**

ELORA, ON – (April 9, 2026) The Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) annual conference convened today, marking a pivotal moment for the organization with the appointment of new leadership, the celebration of agricultural advocacy, and a major federal investment. Key highlights included the appointment of three new directors, the presentation of the 2026 Food & Farming Champion Award to egg and pullet farmer Tonya Haverkamp, and a \$518,210 funding announcement from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

During the morning's annual business meeting, FFCO welcomed three new members to its Board of Directors:

- Tracey Arts, nominated by Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- Bryan Fieldhouse, nominated by Chicken Farmers of Ontario;
- Alan Kruszel, nominated by Grain Farmers of Ontario;

The organization also expressed deep gratitude to three retiring directors for their years of dedicated service: past chair Crispin Colvin (Ontario Federation of Agriculture), Andrea Veldhuizen (Chicken Farmers of Ontario), and Steve Lake (Grain Farmers of Ontario). A new board executive will be elected later this month.

Tonya Haverkamp, an egg and pullet farmer from the Listowel area, was named the 2026 Food & Farming Champion. Since 1999, this award has recognized individuals who excel at opening their barn doors—and their stories—to non-farming neighbours. Haverkamp's nomination highlighted a career defined by transparent communication, ranging from local classrooms to international development projects in Nepal.

"Tonya Haverkamp embodies the values of a true public trust champion," said Donna Lange, who nominated Haverkamp on behalf of Egg Farmers of Ontario. "She connects with audiences of all ages in a warm, conversational way that makes the dedication behind high-quality egg production evident to all."

The nomination points to Haverkamp's extensive volunteer record, which includes representing the industry at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, the Canadian National Exhibition, the International Plowing Match and many local events including Breakfasts on the Farm. Beyond

public events, she has been instrumental in mentoring the next generation of agricultural ambassadors, helping other farmers learn to share their stories authentically.

In a video address to a large industry crowd, Dominique O'Rourke, Member of Parliament for Guelph, announced funding for three Farm & Food Care organizations through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership's AgriCompetitiveness Program. Spanning from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2028, up to \$518,210 in funding will support four national initiatives shared by the Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island offices including:

- The Agri-Communicators' Network: A national hub for industry advocates.
- Faces Behind Food: Expanded outreach on Facebook and Instagram.
- *The Real Dirt on Farming*: Production of the publication's seventh edition.
- FarmFood360.ca: Development of four new national Virtual Reality tours.

Janelle Cardiff, Chair of FFCO, called the funding "fundamental" to the collective mission of the three groups. "This investment allows us to move beyond provincial borders and scale our agricultural advocacy to a truly national level," Cardiff said. "Farm & Food Care has valued a strong partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) since 2019, and we are grateful for this continued support of four critical public trust projects."

"Canadian agriculture is built on the passion and innovation of our farmers and food leaders," said the Honourable Heath MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. "By supporting initiatives that bring their stories directly to Canadians, we're connecting consumers and producers and fostering a deeper understanding of where our food comes from."

"Guelph is proud to be home to leading agricultural organizations like Farm & Food Care Ontario," said Dominique O'Rourke, Member of Parliament for Guelph. "By helping farmers and food system partners share their stories from coast to coast, this funding empowers Canadians to make informed choices and celebrates the diversity of our agri-food community."

Other meeting highlights included keynote speaker Tyler Heppell (known online as Potato Ty) a fifth-generation farmer turned social media creator, based in Vancouver.

Lindsey Middleton and Katie Uhlmann, the producers of the Canadian comedy-series *The Cows Come Home* spoke about how cinematic storytelling can capture the heart of the farming lifestyle for a wider audience.

A panel of Ontario farmers – including Chris Hiemstra of Clovermead Adventure Farm, Korb Whale of Mapleton's Organic Dairy Farm and John and Maxine Zekveld of Zekveld's Garden Market led an insightful discussion focused on agricultural outreach and education as it relates to the success of on-farm events and tours.

Through these new leadership appointments, national project funding, and the celebration of champions like Tonya Haverkamp, Farm & Food Care Ontario remains committed to its mission of fostering meaningful connections between Ontario's farmers, food partners and Ontario consumers.

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2026 Food & Farming Champion, Tonya Haverkamp

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Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO), is a coalition of farmers, agriculture and food partners proactively working together to grow public trust and confidence in food and farming. Find out more at [www.FarmFoodCareON.org](http://www.FarmFoodCareON.org).