



Thanks for the Coverage, Voice of the Farmer!
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Farms at Work recognized the grant they received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation last week at the registered Dorset sheep farm owned by Bob and Gail Irvine of Selwyn. (L to R): Selwyn Township Mayor Mary Smith; Peterborough MPP & Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Jeff Leal; Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant Review Team volunteer, Dr. Ramesh Makhija; and Farms at Work Director, Pat Learmonth attended the event that showcased local productive farming.

- SUBMITTED PHOTO

FARMS AT WORK working to educate Farmers

By: Cathy Hamill-Hill,
VOTF Contributing Editor

Most farmers can name a couple of people as mentors, who have helped them get a start in the business of farming, which is mostly about learning from experiences instead of from a text book. It is easily understood why the "Farms at Work" Educational On-Farm Mentorship Program has seen such huge success with having individuals in small groups receiving about 30 hours of education from experienced farmers that currently operate successful farms.

The Farms at Work program that began in 2009 is a non-profit local agricultural organization that was founded by Pat Learmonth about six years ago. She said, after leaving the USA with her husband and moving to Ontario to buy a farm in the Peterborough area, she looked around to see what could be learned locally in farming- and found little. After years of thought and research, she launched "Farms at Work" which is all about promoting "healthy and active farmland".

Programs for Farms at Work have included helping farmers learn about farm stewardship and native pollinators.

Recently, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Peterborough M.P.P. Jeff Leal and members of the Ontario Trillium Foundation visited the Sheep Mentorship program at work at one of their five field days. Local members of council joined in with the event that was held to recognize the Ontario Trillium Grant that was a 3 year, \$192,300 grant given to Farms at Work. The event was held at the Sheep Mentor's Rocky Lane farm, home of Bob and Gail Irvine.

Jay Adam, program coordinator for Farms at Work explains that it was decided to ask the special guests to come at this time to see the Mentorship program in action.

"The Mentorship Program has grown each year. We are adding Maple Syrup production this fall. We have expanded from Sheep and Beekeeping, adding in Pasture Management. Each of our sessions have been full since we started," Jay explained. He added, "The mentors are never farmers that just started with their type of farming; we select our mentors carefully and we contract only those with the right amount of experience and expertise."

Pat Learmonth said she feels strongly that Ontario needs more farmers. "The numbers of farmers we have lost (exited) from farming and the amount of farmland lost (to other uses) shows we need people from places other than agriculture to come into farming. We need to be realistic as to how our future of farming is going to be built."

The Mentorship Program is encouraging people to try farming. "We see our mentees range from new entrants to farming, to retirees looking to diversify. We have a whole range of demographics. We want to tap into new minds and create profitable business models for our future," she said.

With so much success with the current Mentorship Program, Pat says that Farms at Work is considering branching out to other commodities and other areas in the future.

The Mentorship Program for Maple Syrup production is now looking for applicants. More information can be found at: www.farmsatwork.ca



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