

# Media Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Outstanding Young Farmers Award Winners Are Also Committed to the Environment**

NEWMARKET, ONTARIO April 6, 2010 - Conservation Ontario is pleased to congratulate Steve and Lisa Cooper of Zephyr, Ontario as winners of this year's **Ontario Outstanding Young Farmers' Award**. Conservation Ontario was a sponsor of the Awards Banquet held in Belleville on March 30, 2010.

There were six finalists out of 36 nominations vying for the honour of representing Ontario at the National Award event being held later this year in British Columbia.

The Coopers have a very diverse farm located about an hour north of Toronto. They operate a market garden, on-farm store, agri-entertainment area with a corn maze and they support 600 members in a Community Shared Agriculture program.

The Coopers are also committed to the environment. They manage their water supply with a biodegradable plastic mulch and drip irrigation. As well, the use of a certified crop scout and an integrated pest management plan has enabled them to reduce their use of pest and disease control products by 75% over the past ten years.

Celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> year, Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers program is an annual competition to recognize farmers that exemplify excellence in their profession and promote the tremendous contribution of agriculture and rural Canada.

"There was a very impressive and inspirational line-up of finalists each showing a wide range of innovative approaches to farming," said Jo-Anne Rzedki, Watershed Stewardship Coordinator for Conservation Ontario. Conservation Ontario represents Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities who work in partnership with many landowners all over Ontario implementing numerous stewardship projects.

"In addition to planning and implementing a variety of different initiatives on their farms, the nominees also talked about the important environmental stewardship projects they were involved with. For example, goat farmer Katie Normet of Arthur, is one of the finalists who has worked closely with Grand River Conservation Authority and most of the others had completed Environmental Farm Plans," Rzedki said.

Anthony and Marj Sjaarda from Wyoming, Ontario were runners up for the award. The couple operate Sjaarda Caprine Farms, a dairy goat operation. The Sjaardas are the first goat farmers in Ontario to develop a Nutrient Management Strategy.

Farmers nominated and selected for this award are judged according to:

- Progress made in their agricultural career
- Environmental and safety practices
- Crop and livestock production history
- Financial and management practices
- Contributions to the well being of their community, province, nation

The award banquet was sponsored by a variety of government, businesses and associations. For more information <http://www.oyfontario.ca/> .

The list of Ontario finalists included:

Steve and Lisa Cooper, horticulture, goats, agri-tourism, Zephr  
Matthew Fischer, turkeys, Listowel  
Hugh and Arlene Hunter, dairy, Smiths Falls  
Katie Normet, goat cheese and soaps, Arthur  
Anthony and Marj Sjaarda, dairy goats, Wyoming  
Amy Strom, sweet corn, agri-tourism, Guelph

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