



Grey County Beef Farmer Wins 2016 Ontario Pasture Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 18, 2016 (Toronto, ON) - The sponsors of the Ontario Pasture Award, the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO), Mapleseed and the Ontario Forage Council (OFC), are pleased to announce that Kevin Aitken of Maple-Dale Farms from the Holstein area in Grey County is the winner of the 2016 Ontario Pasture Award. The Award was presented yesterday at the BFO Annual General Meeting in Toronto.

For his environmental improvements and exceptional pasture management, Aitken will receive a cash award of \$500 and a bag of forage seed courtesy of Mapleseed.

Maple-Dale Farms consists of 240 owned acres, 200 of which are in pasture, along with an additional 35 acres of rented land. Aitken runs a purebred Hereford operation with 97 cow-calf pairs and 15 Holstein dry cows on pasture, including those that are owned and also some that are custom grazed during the summer months.

In 2009, Aitken made the decision to seed all of his un-pastured land into a permanent pasture. Since then, 5,000 feet of waterline have been installed to provide fresh water to each paddock for a convenient water supply at all times.

All pasture land is intensively rotationally grazed, and Aitken stresses that his goal is to produce the maximum amount of pasture growth each day of the year, in order to maximize the genetic potential of his herd. Pasture is his main source of feed from roughly mid-April to mid-November, and Aitken purchases locally sourced hay for his owned cows through the winter months, which eliminates the need for additional equipment and extra labour.

"I should have started managing my pastures more intensively 20 years ago," stated Aitken. "Our land would have been in much better condition."

Barry Robinson, Sales Manager with Mapleseed, commented that the pasture management program utilized on Aitken's farm is a model that should be considered by more beef farmers across the province. Well-managed pastures have many environmental benefits, as well as herd health advantages. Rotational grazing allows farmers to evaluate the nutritional and forage needs of their animals and assess forage quality and quantity.

"As producers try to maximize the net profit from every acre, the practical techniques being followed on Maple-Dale Farms are a great example of how other producers can improve their pastures and overall profitability of their operation," stated Joan McKinlay, Director of the Ontario Forage Council.

The deadline for applications for the 2017 Ontario Pasture Award is November 30, 2016.

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