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February 6, 2020

2020 Gordon and Sandra Sobey Agriculture Awareness Award

Charlottetown, PE, January 31, 2020 – Since 1993, Gordon and Sandra Sobey along with the PEI Federation of Agriculture have presented an Agriculture Awareness Award in recognition of outstanding efforts in projecting a positive image of agriculture on Prince Edward Island.

This year's recipient is Vanco Farms Ltd. Vanco Farms Ltd. specializes in growing specialty potatoes, organic potatoes, premium cut tulips, and tulip bulbs. The potato operation is family owned and operated by three brothers; Willem, Rit, and Phillip VanNieuwenhuyzen and the tulip operation is owned and operated by Bas Arendse. Together, along with family and many dedicated staff members, they encompass Vanco Farms Ltd.

The VanNieuwenhuyzen family have deep roots in the agriculture industry in PEI and Holland, with their families growing various crops which included potatoes and tulips. In 1982, the VanNieuwenhuyzen family moved to Prince Edward Island and purchased a mixed farm. 2001 was the beginning of the current generation, as brothers Willem, Rit, and Phillip took over the family farm and changed the focus to growing organic, specialty potatoes, and tulips.

Over the years they have done countless amounts of farm and greenhouse tours and each Spring they allow the public to visit and take photos of their tulip fields. Vanco Farms Ltd. is active on social media and knows how important it is to share photos and info of their farm to be honest and transparent to consumers. Vanco Farms Ltd. projects a positive image of agriculture on PEI by keeping followers informed online and opening up their farm for consumers to get a first-hand view of an island farm.

The VanNieuwenhuyzen's have strong family values and know how important it is to educate the next generation on how food gets from farm to table. They have hosted Farm & Food Care PEI's second annual Breakfast on the Farm on August 3rd, 2019 which brought in a crowd of 1000 people. Breakfast on the Farm provides a unique opportunity for farmers and non-farming Islanders to have a conversation about food and farming. It provides a showcase for our local agriculture and the food industry. It also provides non-farmers the opportunity to meet Island farmers and the people that help put the food on their plate. Guests who attended this second annual event were treated to a free PEI-sourced Breakfast and had the opportunity to tour a PEI potato and tulip family farm while having their questions answered by the people that help produce the food we eat.

Vanco Farms Ltd. is also very community orientated and supports "Tulips for the QEH" annually which sells bouquets of tulips with all proceeds being donated to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation to help raise money to update essential equipment.

On PEI today, farmers represent a very small percentage of the Island population. It used to be that kids had a parent, a grandparent or a close relative that operated a farm. Today, many kids are several generations removed from agriculture and do not fully understand what the industry is, and ultimately where their food comes from.

The owners and staff of Vanco Farms Ltd understand important public outreach is and has completed outstanding efforts in projecting a positive image of agriculture on PEI. They are a very deserving recipient of the 2020 Gordon and Sandra Sobey Agriculture Awareness Award.

Media contact:

Robert Godfrey

Executive Director, PEI Federation of Agriculture

902-368-7289

rgodfrey@peifa.ca