

*For immediate release*

## **Prairie winemakers and Quebec sheep farmers share Canada's 2012 Outstanding Young Farmers honour**

**Ancaster, ON [December 4, 2012]** – Saskatchewan fruit wine producers and first generation Quebec sheep farmers are Canada's 2012 Outstanding Young Farmers (OYF). Sue Echlin and Vance Lester of Perdue, Saskatchewan and Martin Brodeur Choquette and Johanne Cameron of St-Charles-sur-Richelieu, Quebec were chosen from seven regional farm couples across Canada, at the OYF annual national event held recently in Charlottetown, PEI.

OYF's latest farm family winners share a determination and drive to follow their passion for a life and business in agriculture. Sue Echlin and Vance Lester turned their horse hay farm into Living Sky Winery producing wine from farm-grown fruits. And non-farming roots didn't diminish the dream that Martin Brodeur Choquette and Johanne Cameron shared to farm full time, a dream they are living with their first generation sheep and cash crop operation.

“Every year, OYF has the unique opportunity to showcase Canadian farm families that exemplify the spirit and innovation that drives this industry” says OYF President Derek Janzen. “When you consider the perseverance that propels this year's winners to start a winery on the Canadian prairies and establish a first generation livestock operation, Canadian agriculture has never been so strong.”

A wine tour in British Columbia provided the inspiration for Living Sky winery – Sue Echlin and Vance Lester's fruit winery near Perdue, Saskatchewan. Today, their operation consists of 1,500 apple and saskatoon trees in full production. Their award winning fruit wines, including rhubarb, raspberry and haskap, is produced from on-farm and locally-sourced fruit.

Producing high quality product and paying attention to consumer trends are the cornerstones of their operation. As demand continued to grow, Living Sky Winery has expanded their product selection to include port, ice wines, mistelles and cider.

After overhauling their horse hay producing farm for their new winery, Sue and Vance made an important business decision – they hired a professional fruit winemaker before even planting their first fruit tree. Sue and Vance work with government officials and others in the Saskatchewan spirit industry to help move the industry forward in this relatively new, but highly regulated industry.

Martin Brodeur Choquette and Johanne Cameron shared a common, ambitious dream: to earn their living from farming. The fact that neither of their parents owned a farming operation didn't stand in their way. At the age of 15, Martin began building his sheep flock with the purchase of his first ewe. After finishing his agricultural studies at age 20, he was already able to live off his 350 head flock.

At the same time, Johanne was also building a flock while earning a degree in agronomy and a Master's degree in sheep reproduction. Her then 25-head flock included a supreme champion and several grand champions.

When Martin and Johanne met in 2004, they combined their love of agriculture and knowledge of sheep farming into a very successful farming operation – Les Bergeries Marovine (MH) – that today includes a flock of nearly 1,200 head, including 650 ewes, and 210 acres of farmed land.

Sue Echlin and Vance Lester from Saskatchewan, and Martin Brodeur Choquette and Johanne Cameron from Quebec were chosen from the seven 2012 regional finalists – that included the following honourees from the other five regions – Mark and Sally Bernard (Atlantic region), Cory and Heidi Van Groningen (Ontario region), Dustin Williams and Laura McDougald-Williams (Manitoba region), Robert and Angela Semeniuk (Alberta/NWT region), and Peter and Nicole Tuytel (British Columbia/Yukon region).

Completing its 32<sup>nd</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. Open to participants 18 to 39 years of age, making the majority of income from on-farm sources, participants are selected from seven regions across Canada, with two national winners chosen each year. The program is sponsored nationally by CIBC, John Deere, Bayer CropScience and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and supported nationally by AdFarm and Farm Management Canada.

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**For more information or a photo of the 2012 OYF winners, contact:**

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