



OUTSTANDING YOUNG FARMERS TAKE DIRECT ROUTE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Abbotsford – January 31, 2010 – A focus on direct marketing of organic and conventional fruits, vegetables and wines produced on their 660-acre farm in Oliver earned Gene and Shelly Covert of Covert Farms and Dunham and Froese Estate Winery the 2010 Outstanding Young Farmer award. Over 400 people cheered as the Coverts received the prestigious award from BC Minister of Agriculture and Lands Steve Thomson and Canadian OYF program vice-president and 2005 BC OYF winner Derek Janzen at the annual BC Agriculture Gala in Abbotsford, Jan 27th.

Gene and Shelly are the third generation of Coverts to operate the farm begun in 1959 by Covert's grandfather, a California tomato grower. Originally the farm grew only onions and tomatoes but it now produces over 60 crops. After beginning a small organic section in 2005, the Coverts now have 138 acres in certified organic production and look forward to operating the entire farm under biodynamic principles.

“Biodynamics is a very exciting aspect of agriculture,” Gene says, noting it focuses on soil health and “developing sustainability through biodiversity” by treating the farm as a living organism.

While the Coverts market their product throughout Western Canada, most is sold direct through their on-farm Covert Farms Organic Market and pick-your-own organic market garden.

“Word of mouth is our best asset,” Shelly notes.

In 2005, the Coverts planted a 15-acre vineyard and have added another 15 acres this past year. Their estate winery now produces about 2000 cases/year of red, white and rose wines.

The Coverts, who were also finalists for the 2009 award, will now represent the province in the Canadian Outstanding Young Farmer finals to be held in Victoria in November.

Runners-up for the 2010 award were twin brothers Ricki and Newton Sahota of Twinberry Farms in Pitt Meadows. The Sahota brothers have developed a unique direct-to-office marketing system and are also creating a boutique processing plant and Blue Barn Farmers Market to market fresh and processed blueberries from their 163-acre farm.

“It is in the self-interest of all Canadians to encourage young people in agriculture,” Janzen said, noting both the Coverts and the Sahotas represent “positive role models for youth in agriculture.”

To be eligible for the Outstanding Young Farmer award, farmers must be between 19 and 40 years of age, derive at least two thirds of their income from farming and demonstrate progress in their agriculture careers. Nominees are judged on conservation practices, production history, financial and management practices, and community contributions. Judging the 2010 competition were agricultural financial consultant Barry Remus, RBC account manager Lana Dueck and 1999 BC OYF winner David Janssens.

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The BCOYF program is sponsored by Agri Digest Online, Bank of Montreal, BC Broiler Hatching Egg Commission, BC Chicken Marketing Board, BC Egg Producers Association, BC Holstein News, BC Landscape & Nursery Association, BC Milk Marketing Board, Bobcat Country Sales, Clearbrook Grain & Milling, Community Insurance, Country Life in BC, Farm Credit Canada, Golden Valley Foods, Island Milk Producers, Pioneer HiBred, Prairie Coast Equipment, Ritchie Smith Feeds, RBC Royal Bank, Scotiabank, TD Canada Trust, Unifeed and United Agri Systems.

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Reference: David Schmidt
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