
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Agriculture

B.C. COUPLE COMPETE FOR OUTSTANDING YOUNG FARMERS TITLE

VICTORIA – British Columbia is hosting a national competition to find Canada’s most innovative young farmers who are growing food and farming in new ways, announced Minister of Agriculture Ben Stewart today. Young farmers from seven of the country’s regions will compete in the Outstanding Young Farmers’ National Competition being held in Victoria Nov. 23-28.

“The creative, dynamic young farmers who are competing this weekend are moving agriculture forward into new territory,” said Stewart. “A growing number of British Columbians are supporting farmers and eating local food. Celebrating innovation in agriculture and our farmers’ success stories is really important if we want to feed B.C.-grown food to future generations.”

Among the competitors are Gene and Shelly Covert, winners of the 2010 B.C. Outstanding Young Farmer Award who run a third-generation fruit and vegetable farm in Oliver and are also the parents of three young children. When Gene’s father died suddenly in 2004, the Coverts were faced with about 142 hectares (350 acres) in production, hundreds of seasonal workers and low margins.

Today, nearly half of Covert Farms produces organic crops grown in biodegradable, GMO-free cornstarch mulch. The operation relies almost entirely on ladybugs for pest control.

The Coverts’ farm also features an organic winery, and a country market with food service and a cappuccino bar. Every year, around 2,000 people visit Covert Farms for the Festival of the Tomato, a one-day event that celebrates local agriculture.

“Before I was a farmer, I was a school teacher and I know there is a real need to educate the public about farming,” said Shelly Covert. “That’s something we try to do every day at Covert Farms. We want people to realize how connected farming is to the food they eat every day.”

Canada’s Outstanding Young Farmers’ program is an annual competition that recognizes farmers who exemplify excellence in their profession. The competition is open to farmers between 18 and 39 years old who earn most of their income from on-farm sources. Participants are selected from seven regions across Canada, with two national winners chosen. Funding for the event’s education sessions is provided in part by the Investment Agriculture Foundation, an organization that invests federal and provincial funds in innovative projects that benefit B.C.’s agri-food industry.

This year's event is being held at the Fairmont Empress Hotel. Judging takes place over several days and the winners will be announced at an evening banquet on Friday, Nov. 26.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.oyfcanada.com/>

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