

Canadian Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and Pollinator Partnership (P2) are pleased to solicit nominees for the **2012 Canadian Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award**. This award recognizes an individual or family in the farm and ranch community in Canada who has contributed significantly to pollinator species protection and conservation on working and wild lands. CFA and P2, through their recognition and appreciation of these individuals and organizations, encourage their conservation stewardship and hope to catalyze future actions on behalf of pollinators through public recognition of the award winner.

The recipients of the 2012 award will be recognized during an evening reception at the **Canadian Embassy on Wednesday October 13, 2012 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm** in Washington D.C., or in their hometown if they are unable to attend.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) is the nonprofit organization that was formed in 1935 to act as the national voice of Canadian farmers. It is the country's largest farmers' organization, representing provincial general farm organizations as well as national and interprovincial commodity organizations from every province - over 200,000 Canadian farmers and farm families. The CFA's mission is to promote the interests of Canadian agriculture and agri-food producers, including farm families, through leadership at the national level and to ensure the continued development of a viable and vibrant agriculture and agri-food industry in Canada. One of its objectives is to promote and advance acceptance of positive social, economic and environmental conditions of those engaged in agricultural pursuits; pollination is an area that has a direct impact on all three conditions, and is becoming increasingly important for farmers to recognize and promote on their farms.

The Pollinator Partnership (P2) is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation in the US and Canada that, since its inception in 1997, has established itself as an innovator in pollinator protection across North America. P2 works to promote widespread collaborative stewardship practices on open and working lands, within institutions, and among individuals. One of P2's strategies is to improve the health and survival of all species by promoting the importance and wonder of pollinators, and by protecting their habitats.

To complete your nomination, please return the attached form to Vicki Wojcik at the Pollinator Partnership by **Tuesday September 4th, 2012**. Awardees will be notified no later than September 11, 2012 to allow for travel arrangements.

Forms can be sent as an e-mail attachment to vw@pollinator.org (please put "Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award" as the subject line) or faxed to 415-362-3070.

Canadian Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award Nomination Form

Please return the attached form to Vicki Wojcik at the Pollinator Partnership by **Wednesday September 5th, 2012**. Forms can be sent as an e-mail attachment to vw@pollinator.org (please put "Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award" as the subject line) or faxed to 415-362-3070.

My Name: Mark Wonneck, Ecologist, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

My E-mail: Mark.Wonneck@agr.gc.ca Phone: 403-292-4388

I wish to nominate the following individual or family in the farm and ranch community for the Canadian Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award:

Nominee's Name: Don and Marie Ruzicka

Farm/Ranch: Sunrise Farm, Killam, Alberta

Nominee E-mail: don@sunrisefarm.ca Phone: 780-385-2474

Nomination Narrative (You may insert your narrative below or attach additional sheets as necessary):

1. Briefly describe nominees and their farm or ranch operation (location, size, crop, community).

In 1983, Don Ruzicka and his wife Marie and three children moved to the prairie farm near Killam, in east central Alberta, that was settled by Don's grandparents in 1910. At that time, they farmed 1120 acres, growing grains and beef for the commodities market. They were "efficient" farmers. And, the more efficient they became the more wetlands, sloughs and trees disappeared from their land. *But back in 1983 nobody really noticed.* It took until 1996 before Don and Marie would see value in maintaining wetlands, grasslands, riparian areas and replanting trees. Inspired by the model of diversity and resiliency in nature, in their own prairie ecosystem, they decided to make a change that would see them become more diverse in what they raise and grow. And with this change, the landscape on their farm has been re-built to abundant biodiversity, and "stewardship" is the cornerstone to keeping it going. "Diversity, biodiversity and stewardship" is the path to their sustainability.

In 1996, they sold 320 acres to pay off their existing debts and seeded 600 acres to grasses and legumes, with the remaining 200 acres in native pasture, treed blocks and wetlands. Sunrise Farm has been certified organic since 2000. The farm today consists of a small herd of 30 cows that live totally off forages with no grain in their diet. They calve in sync with the seasons just like wildlife in May and June. Chickens, turkeys and laying hens are raised in open-air shelters that are moved every morning to a fresh patch of grasses, legumes, dandelions and insects. Hogs enjoy forages as well. This model of raising them allows the pig its greatest joy, to root. The shelters are equipped with an in-house shower for the hogs to keep cool and hanging balls for play. They are moved to fresh pasture twice per day. And they custom graze yearling grass cattle, the number of which depends on soil moisture and the grass growth that year.

Don and Marie take a holistic approach to food production, and all of their management practices strive to produce nutritious and healthy food in a way that is sensitive to and complements the ecological functioning of their land. Some of their management practices include:

All the dugouts, creeks and wetlands on the farm have been to keep the cattle out of the water and to protect important riparian areas. The resulting clean water is pumped to the cattle using a portable solar powered pump. The cattle realize better gains and have less health problems by drinking clean water. This also allows even distribution of manure and urine in each paddock. The incidence of foot rot is almost entirely eliminated by keeping the cattle out of the dugouts.

A “Cows and Fish” riparian health assessment on the farm in 2001 scored 77%, which is considered “healthy but with problems”. Five years later, in 2006, a re-assessment scored 84% which is “healthy”.

Since 2003, Don has planted over 45,000 trees, shrubs and berry-producing bushes. These plants are fenced off from livestock and cover an area of about 55 acres. Included in these are six wildlife habitat plantings intended to promote wild biodiversity on the farm.

In 2001, Don built and erected 150 bird houses and put 30 on each of the quarter sections. The occupancy rate was 27% the first year and has risen steadily to 97% in 2009 with now over 240 bird houses.

As a result of becoming increasingly aware of the role of pollinators in agricultural ecosystems and concern about Colony Collapse Disorder, the Ruzicka's have specifically added pollinator conservation to their farm agenda and miss no opportunity to promote awareness of pollinators and the need for conservation. A key initiative in this regard is a partnership research project with the Science and Technology Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to establish alternative shelterbelt designs across their pastures and assess their effects on pollinator populations.

2. Describe the contributions of the individual or family farmer/rancher to pollinator protection and conservation on working and wild lands, including but not limited to “on-the-ground” pollinator conservation, best management practices, development of conservation partnerships, and demonstration projects that promote pollinator awareness and conservation.

In 2010, Don requested Mark Wonneck and Gary Bank of the now Science and Technology Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada give him ideas of how he could improve habitat for wild pollinators on his farm. He was and is strongly motivated to farm in harmony with nature and he wanted to ensure he was doing all he could to create conditions where pollinators could thrive. He also recognized that by doing so he may be able to enhance alfalfa and cicer milkvetch seed production in his pastures, which helps him to keep his pastures healthy and productive. In fact, pollinator conservation has become one of the highest priorities on the farm. A research project was initiated in 2010 to improve understanding of how to best design shelterbelts for pollinators. In 2011 the first block of three 90 metre treatments bisecting one of his pastures was planted. The treatments differ in their plant species diversity and structural complexity – a two-row chokecherry monoculture, a three-row 10 species medium diversity belt, and a 7-row 40 species belt. In 2012, two more blocks of the three treatments each were planted in two other large pastures. The more complex treatments have been termed “ecobuffers”. Don has spent many hours preparing, planting

and weeding/mowing the belts to aid in their establishment. His unbridled enthusiasm for the project is infectious. He never fails to talk about the project and its goal of pollinator conservation with everyone who visits the farm or during his many speaking engagements. His advocacy is remarkable, and is all the more powerful because of his credibility as a producer who has found a path toward agricultural sustainability. He truly does “walk the talk”.

It is important to note that Sunrise Farms welcomes visitors and tours. In fact, Don and Marie make it a requirement of anyone interested in purchasing their products that they visit the farm first and see where and how their food is produced. Each year, about 150 visitors come to visit and learn about the farm. In the past year, the ecobuffer project and its goal of pollinator conservation have become the highlight for all visitors. Among the regular visitors are students from the Community Service Learning program at the University of Alberta, which has been bringing students to the farm since 2006 to do specific projects related sustainable farming. The students get a grade and the Ruzickas learn something about improving their farm. The students have acknowledged this experience has given them a completely different way of looking at agriculture from a stewardship and sustainability perspective. In 2011, four students are doing projects on:

- The cost of taking the farm off the grid
- How many abattoirs have disappeared in the last five years and why
- **The importance of pollinating insects in agriculture**
- The health benefits of beef that is totally raised on forages

In addition to farm visits, Don is frequently invited to speak to various groups to share the story of the farm and the how and why of pollinator conservation, sustainable agriculture and natural and organic food production. Engagements include:

- 2011 - February – Fort Macleod – Oldman Watershed Council Holding the Reins Conference - “Stewardship+Diversity+Biodiversity: On the Path to Sustainability”
- 2010 – December – Vermilion – Western Canadian Grazing Conference - “The Benefits of Grazing Poultry and Hogs”
- 2010 - March – Winnipeg – Prairie Conservation and Species At Risk Conference – “Niche Market Farming and Ecosystem Management”
- 2010 - February – Russel, Manitoba – Western Canadian Holistic Management Conference – “Stewardship: On the Road to Sustainability”
- 2008 – November – Saskatoon – Western Canadian Organic Conference: Organic Connections – “Biodiversity and Holistic Management”
- 2008 - July – Calgary – Keynote – Canadian National Stewardship Conference: Practicing Stewardship: Every Step of the Way - “Consumer Supported Agriculture”

Don is also connected to and influences other producers through his involvement in local community initiatives such as:

- The “Iron Creek Watershed Improvement Society” whose mission is: To raise awareness about the importance and function of our local watershed and promote the benefits of sustainable management techniques. Don is a founding member and Chair of the group.
- University of Alberta’s Augustana Campus’ “Human Library Project”, where he signed up be a book titled, “Beyond Organic: I Want to Be Your Farmer”, and was allowed to be “checked out” for an hour to teach people about sustainable agricultural practices.

- The “Battle River Alliance for Economic Development” for which Don was one of 30 participants invited to give input into new initiatives for economic development across the eight municipalities represented by the Alliance.
 - The “Rural Outreach and Agricultural Renaissance Society” for which Don is a founding member.
 - The “Alberta Rural Sustainable Alternatives Network” which is focused on the development of sustainable rural communities supported by sustainable agriculture. Don is again a founding member.
3. Describe the impact that this person or family has had on pollinator conservation.

It is difficult to begin to assess the impact of Don and Marie’s efforts in implementing practices and promoting pollinator conservation. Their efforts are like seeds – and they are good seeds. Sunrise Farm is a place of optimism, hope and solutions. It is a scene of green pastures, some with small groups of cattle managed with electric fences and, moveable pens housing poultry and pigs. It radiates landscape health. It produces food and sustainable living for Don and Marie. And it reflects caring, for the land, for the surrounding and broader community and for their customers. Because of all of this (and also their many awards, that include most recently the 2011 Alberta Emerald Award: Individual Commitment Award, the 2008 “L.B. Thomson Award” from Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration awarded yearly in Western Canada for soil and water conservation, the 2007 “Environmental Stewardship” Growing Alberta Leadership Award), Sunrise Farms has credibility and integrity. And so the seeds of inspiration they sow for pollinator conservation are good ones.

The Ruzicka’s have demonstrated that they are committed to pollinator conservation, both by doing and promoting it. The combination is powerful -- one person practicing stewardship and being able to demonstrate the benefits is better than fifty preaching it!

Their efforts merit the Canadian Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award.