

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New crop of leaders for Ontario agriculture

LONDON, ON - Rural Ontario has a new crop of leaders as the current class of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) graduated at their final seminar in London, Ontario on April 2, 2011.

The graduation weekend for AALP Class 13 kicked off with the William A. Stewart Lecture featuring Retired General Rick Hillier, Canada's former chief of defense as the guest speaker on March 31, 2011. General Hillier shared his thoughts on leadership with the graduating class, AALP alumni and guests. He shared three key characteristics of great leaders: toughness; ruthlessness; and optimism; and emphasized the importance of focusing on people. "One of the best ways to motivate and lead your team is with optimism and humour. They both cost you nothing, and they both will help you immensely in times of stress and your deepest, darkest moments," Hillier said.

Valedictorian Sarah Brown reflected on AALP Class 13's 19-month leadership journey at the graduation banquet on April 2, 2011. "We've covered a lot of ground over our journey," said Brown. "We hiked our share of rainforests in Guatemala and Belize. We've had the opportunity to meet inspiring, intelligent and thought provoking leaders, and have seen things that have humbled us, opened our minds, challenged our perceptions and motivated us to continue to stretch our wings as leaders."

Brown also reminded her classmates of the power and the responsibility they have going forward. "We have the audacity, the courage, the positive attitude and the know how to affect change, to empower and motivate – to lead – for the benefit of our local communities, agriculture and rural Ontario."

Included in the evening's program was the presentation of the Richard Lichty Memorial Award, to Class 13's Bonnie denHaan, of Haanview Farms near Alliston, ON. Chosen by their class peers, the recipient exemplifies leadership qualities such as passion for their rural community and agriculture, and faith in the ability of people to make a difference.

The Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) is a 19-month executive development program for men and women in the agriculture, agri-food, and rural sectors in Ontario. AALP is administered by the Rural Ontario Institute. The selection process for AALP Class 14 is currently underway.

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